IN SEARCH OF THE UNKNOWN

Robert W. Chambers

ALICE & BOOKS

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TO MY FRIEND E. LE GRAND BEERS

MY DEAR LE GRAND,—You and I were early drawn together by a common love of nature. Your researches into the natural history of the tree-toad, your observations upon the mud-turtles of Providence Township, your experiments with the fresh-water lobster, all stimulated my enthusiasm in a scientific direction, which has crystallized in this helpful little book, dedicated to you.

Pray accept it as an insignificant payment on account for all I owe to you.

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE

It appears to the writer that there is urgent need of more "nature books"—books that are scraped clear of fiction and which display only the carefully articulated skeleton of fact. Hence this little volume, presented with some hesitation and more modesty. Various chapters have, at intervals, appeared in the pages of various publications. The continued narrative is now published for the first time; and the writer trusts that it may inspire enthusiasm for natural and scientific research, and inculcate a passion for accurate observation among the young.

THE AUTHOR.

April 1, 1904.

Where the slanting forest eaves, Shingled tight with greenest leaves, Sweep the scented meadow-sedge, Let us snoop along the edge; Let us pry in hidden nooks, Laden with our nature books, Scaring birds with happy cries, Chloroforming butterflies, Rooting up each woodland plant, Pinning beetle, fly, and ant, So we may identify What we've ruined, by-and-by.

Chapter 1

Because it all seems so improbable—so horribly impossible to me now, sitting here safe and sane in my own library—I hesitate to record an episode which already appears to me less horrible than grotesque. Yet, unless this story is written now, I know I shall never have the courage to tell the truth about the matter—not from fear of ridicule, but because I myself shall soon cease to credit what I now know to be true. Yet scarcely a month has elapsed since I heard the stealthy purring of what I believed to be the shoaling undertow—scarcely a month ago, with my own eyes, I saw that which, even now, I am beginning to believe never existed. As for the harbor-master—and the blow I am now striking at the old order of things—But of that I shall not speak now, or later; I shall try to tell the story simply and truthfully, and let my friends testify as to my probity and the publishers of this book corroborate them.

On the 29th of February I resigned my position under the government and left Washington to accept an offer from Professor Farrago—whose name he kindly permits me to use—and on the first day of April I entered upon my new and congenial duties as general superintendent of the water-fowl department connected with the Zoological Gardens then in course of erection at Bronx Park, New York.

For a week I followed the routine, examining the new foundations, studying the architect's plans, following the surveyors through the Bronx thickets, suggesting arrangements for water-courses and pools destined to be included in the enclosures for swans, geese,

pelicans, herons, and such of the waders and swimmers as we might expect to acclimate in Bronx Park.

It was at that time the policy of the trustees and officers of the Zoological Gardens neither to employ collectors nor to send out expeditions in search of specimens. The society decided to depend upon voluntary contributions, and I was always busy, part of the day, in dictating answers to correspondents who wrote offering their services as hunters of big game, collectors of all sorts of fauna, trappers, snarers, and also to those who offered specimens for sale, usually at exorbitant rates.

To the proprietors of five-legged kittens, mangy lynxes, moth-eaten coyotes, and dancing bears I returned courteous but uncompromising refusals—of course, first submitting all such letters, together with my replies, to Professor Farrago.

One day towards the end of May, however, just as I was leaving Bronx Park to return to town, Professor Lesard, of the reptilian department, called out to me that Professor Farrago wanted to see me a moment; so I put my pipe into my pocket again and retraced my steps to the temporary, wooden building occupied by Professor Farrago, general superintendent of the Zoological Gardens. The professor, who was sitting at his desk before a pile of letters and replies submitted for approval by me, pushed his glasses down and looked over them at me with a whimsical smile that suggested amusement, impatience, annoyance, and perhaps a faint trace of apology.

"Now, here's a letter," he said, with a deliberate gesture towards a sheet of paper impaled on a file—"a letter that I suppose you remember." He disengaged the sheet of paper and handed it to me.

"Oh yes," I replied, with a shrug; "of course the man is mistaken—or—"

"Or what?" demanded Professor Farrago, tranquilly, wiping his glasses.

"—Or a liar," I replied.

After a silence he leaned back in his chair and bade me read the letter to him again, and I did so with a contemptuous tolerance for the writer, who must have been either a very innocent victim or a

very stupid swindler. I said as much to Professor Farrago, but, to my surprise, he appeared to waver.

"I suppose," he said, with his near-sighted, embarrassed smile, "that nine hundred and ninety-nine men in a thousand would throw that letter aside and condemn the writer as a liar or a fool?"

"In my opinion," said I, "he's one or the other."

"He isn't—in mine," said the professor, placidly.

"What!" I exclaimed. "Here is a man living all alone on a strip of rock and sand between the wilderness and the sea, who wants you to send somebody to take charge of a bird that doesn't exist!"

"How do you know," asked Professor Farrago, "that the bird in question does not exist?"

"It is generally accepted," I replied, sarcastically, "that the great auk has been extinct for years. Therefore I may be pardoned for doubting that our correspondent possesses a pair of them alive."

"Oh, you young fellows," said the professor, smiling wearily, "you embark on a theory for destinations that don't exist."

He leaned back in his chair, his amused eyes searching space for the imagery that made him smile.

"Like swimming squirrels, you navigate with the help of Heaven and a stiff breeze, but you never land where you hope to—do you?"

Rather red in the face, I said: "Don't you believe the great auk to be extinct?"

"Audubon saw the great auk."

"Who has seen a single specimen since?"

"Nobody—except our correspondent here," he replied, laughing.

I laughed, too, considering the interview at an end, but the professor went on, coolly:

"Whatever it is that our correspondent has—and I am daring to believe that it *is* the great auk itself—I want you to secure it for the society."

When my astonishment subsided my first conscious sentiment was one of pity. Clearly, Professor Farrago was on the verge of dotage—ah, what a loss to the world!

I believe now that Professor Farrago perfectly interpreted my thoughts, but he betrayed neither resentment nor impatience. I drew

a chair up beside his desk—there was nothing to do but to obey, and this fool's errand was none of my conceiving.

Together we made out a list of articles necessary for me and itemized the expenses I might incur, and I set a date for my return, allowing no margin for a successful termination to the expedition.

"Never mind that," said the professor. "What I want you to do is to get those birds here safely. Now, how many men will you take?"

"None," I replied, bluntly; "it's a useless expense, unless there is something to bring back. If there is I'll wire you, you may be sure."

"Very well," said Professor Farrago, good-humoredly, "you shall have all the assistance you may require. Can you leave to-night?"

The old gentleman was certainly prompt. I nodded, half-sulkily, aware of his amusement.

"So," I said, picking up my hat, "I am to start north to find a place called Black Harbor, where there is a man named Halyard who possesses, among other household utensils, two extinct great auks —"

We were both laughing by this time. I asked him why on earth he credited the assertion of a man he had never before heard of.

"I suppose," he replied, with the same half-apologetic, half-humorous smile, "it is instinct. I feel, somehow, that this man Halyard *has* got an auk—perhaps two. I can't get away from the idea that we are on the eve of acquiring the rarest of living creatures. It's odd for a scientist to talk as I do; doubtless you're shocked—admit it, now!"

But I was not shocked; on the contrary, I was conscious that the same strange hope that Professor Farrago cherished was beginning, in spite of me, to stir my pulses, too.

"If he has—" I began, then stopped.

The professor and I looked hard at each other in silence.

"Go on," he said, encouragingly.

But I had nothing more to say, for the prospect of beholding with my own eyes a living specimen of the great auk produced a series of conflicting emotions within me which rendered speech profanely superfluous.

As I took my leave Professor Farrago came to the door of the temporary, wooden office and handed me the letter written by the

man Halyard. I folded it and put it into my pocket, as Halyard might require it for my own identification.

"How much does he want for the pair?" I asked.

"Ten thousand dollars. Don't demur—if the birds are really—"

"I know," I said, hastily, not daring to hope too much.

"One thing more," said Professor Farrago, gravely; "you know, in that last paragraph of his letter, Halyard speaks of something else in the way of specimens—an undiscovered species of amphibious biped—just read that paragraph again, will you?"

I drew the letter from my pocket and read as he directed:

"When you have seen the two living specimens of the great auk, and have satisfied yourself that I tell the truth, you may be wise enough to listen without prejudice to a statement I shall make concerning the existence of the strangest creature ever fashioned. I will merely say, at this time, that the creature referred to is an amphibious biped and inhabits the ocean near this coast. More I cannot say, for I personally have not seen the animal, but I have a witness who has, and there are many who affirm that they have seen the creature. You will naturally say that my statement amounts to nothing; but when your representative arrives, if he be free from prejudice, I expect his reports to you concerning this sea-biped will confirm the solemn statements of a witness I *know* to be unimpeachable.

"Yours truly, BURTON HALYARD.

"BLACK HARBOR."

"Well," I said, after a moment's thought, "here goes for the wild-goose chase."

"Wild auk, you mean," said Professor Farrago, shaking hands with me. "You will start to-night, won't you?"

"Yes, but Heaven knows how I'm ever going to land in this man Halyard's door-yard. Good-bye!"

"About that sea-biped—" began Professor Farrago, shyly.

"Oh, don't!" I said; "I can swallow the auks, feathers and claws, but if this fellow Halyard is hinting he's seen an amphibious creature resembling a man—"

"—Or a woman," said the professor, cautiously.

I retired, disgusted, my faith shaken in the mental vigor of Professor Farrago.

Chapter 2

The three days' voyage by boat and rail was irksome. I bought my kit at Sainte Croix, on the Central Pacific Railroad, and on June 1st I began the last stage of my journey *via* the Sainte Isole broad-gauge, arriving in the wilderness by daylight. A tedious forced march by blazed trail, freshly spotted on the wrong side, of course, brought me to the northern terminus of the rusty, narrow-gauge lumber railway which runs from the heart of the hushed pine wilderness to the sea.

Already a long train of battered flat-cars, piled with sluice-props and roughly hewn sleepers, was moving slowly off into the brooding forest gloom, when I came in sight of the track; but I developed a gratifying and unexpected burst of speed, shouting all the while. The train stopped; I swung myself aboard the last car, where a pleasant young fellow was sitting on the rear brake, chewing spruce and reading a letter.

"Come aboard, sir," he said, looking up with a smile; "I guess you're the man in a hurry."

"I'm looking for a man named Halyard," I said, dropping rifle and knapsack on the fresh-cut, fragrant pile of pine. "Are you Halyard?"

"No, I'm Francis Lee, bossing the mica pit at Port-of-Waves," he replied, "but this letter is from Halyard, asking me to look out for a man in a hurry from Bronx Park, New York."

"I'm that man," said I, filling my pipe and offering him a share of the weed of peace, and we sat side by side smoking very amiably, until a signal from the locomotive sent him forward and I was left alone, lounging at ease, head pillowed on both arms, watching the blue sky flying through the branches overhead.

Long before we came in sight of the ocean I smelled it; the fresh, salt aroma stole into my senses, drowsy with the heated odor of pine and hemlock, and I sat up, peering ahead into the dusky sea of pines.

Fresher and fresher came the wind from the sea, in puffs, in mild, sweet breezes, in steady, freshening currents, blowing the feathery crowns of the pines, setting the balsam's blue tufts rocking.

Lee wandered back over the long line of flats, balancing himself nonchalantly as the cars swung around a sharp curve, where water dripped from a newly propped sluice that suddenly emerged from the depths of the forest to run parallel to the railroad track.

"Built it this spring," he said, surveying his handiwork, which seemed to undulate as the cars swept past. "It runs to the cove—or ought to—" He stopped abruptly with a thoughtful glance at me.

"So you're going over to Halyard's?" he continued, as though answering a question asked by himself.

I nodded.

"You've never been there—of course?"

"No," I said, "and I'm not likely to go again."

I would have told him why I was going if I had not already begun to feel ashamed of my idiotic errand.

"I guess you're going to look at those birds of his," continued Lee, placidly.

"I guess I am," I said, sulkily, glancing askance to see whether he was smiling.

But he only asked me, quite seriously, whether a great auk was really a very rare bird; and I told him that the last one ever seen had been found dead off Labrador in January, 1870. Then I asked him whether these birds of Halyard's were really great auks, and he replied, somewhat indifferently, that he supposed they were—at least, nobody had ever before seen such birds near Port-of-Waves.

"There's something else," he said, running, a pine-sliver through his pipe-stem—"something that interests us all here more than auks, big or little. I suppose I might as well speak of it, as you are bound to hear about it sooner or later."

He hesitated, and I could see that he was embarrassed, searching for the exact words to convey his meaning.

"If," said I, "you have anything in this region more important to science than the great auk, I should be very glad to know about it."

Perhaps there was the faintest tinge of sarcasm in my voice, for he shot a sharp glance at me and then turned slightly. After a moment, however, he put his pipe into his pocket, laid hold of the brake with both hands, vaulted to his perch aloft, and glanced down at me.

"Did you ever hear of the harbor-master?" he asked, maliciously.

"Which harbor-master?" I inquired.

"You'll know before long," he observed, with a satisfied glance into perspective.

This rather extraordinary observation puzzled me. I waited for him to resume, and, as he did not, I asked him what he meant.

"If I knew," he said, "I'd tell you. But, come to think of it, I'd be a fool to go into details with a scientific man. You'll hear about the harbor-master—perhaps you will see the harbor-master. In that event I should be glad to converse with you on the subject."

I could not help laughing at his prim and precise manner, and, after a moment, he also laughed, saying:

"It hurts a man's vanity to know he knows a thing that somebody else knows he doesn't know. I'm damned if I say another word about the harbor-master until you've been to Halyard's!"

"A harbor-master," I persisted, "is an official who superintends the mooring of ships—isn't he?"

But he refused to be tempted into conversation, and we lounged silently on the lumber until a long, thin whistle from the locomotive and a rush of stinging salt-wind brought us to our feet. Through the trees I could see the bluish-black ocean, stretching out beyond black headlands to meet the clouds; a great wind was roaring among the trees as the train slowly came to a stand-still on the edge of the primeval forest.

Lee jumped to the ground and aided me with my rifle and pack, and then the train began to back away along a curved side-track which, Lee said, led to the mica-pit and company stores.

"Now what will you do?" he asked, pleasantly. "I can give you a good dinner and a decent bed to-night if you like—and I'm sure Mrs. Lee would be very glad to have you stop with us as long as you choose."

I thanked him, but said that I was anxious to reach Halyard's before dark, and he very kindly led me along the cliffs and pointed out the path.

"This man Halyard," he said, "is an invalid. He lives at a cove called Black Harbor, and all his truck goes through to him over the company's road. We receive it here, and send a pack-mule through once a month. I've met him; he's a bad-tempered hypochondriac, a cynic at heart, and a man whose word is never doubted. If he says he has a great auk, you may be satisfied he has."

My heart was beating with excitement at the prospect; I looked out across the wooded headlands and tangled stretches of dune and hollow, trying to realize what it might mean to me, to Professor Farrago, to the world, if I should lead back to New York a live auk.

"He's a crank," said Lee; "frankly, I don't like him. If you find it unpleasant there, come back to us."

"Does Halyard live alone?" I asked.

"Yes—except for a professional trained nurse—poor thing!"

"A man?"

"No," said Lee, disgustedly.

Presently he gave me a peculiar glance; hesitated, and finally said: "Ask Halyard to tell you about his nurse and—the harbor-master. Good-bye—I'm due at the quarry. Come and stay with us whenever you care to; you will find a welcome at Port-of-Waves."

We shook hands and parted on the cliff, he turning back into the forest along the railway, I starting northward, pack slung, rifle over my shoulder. Once I met a group of quarrymen, faces burned brick-red, scarred hands swinging as they walked. And, as I passed them with a nod, turning, I saw that they also had turned to look after me, and I caught a word or two of their conversation, whirled back to me on the sea-wind.

They were speaking of the harbor-master.

Chapter 3

Towards sunset I came out on a sheer granite cliff where the sea-birds were whirling and clamoring, and the great breakers dashed, rolling in double-thundered reverberations on the sun-dyed, crimson sands below the rock.

Across the half-moon of beach towered another cliff, and, behind this, I saw a column of smoke rising in the still air. It certainly came from Halyard's chimney, although the opposite cliff prevented me from seeing the house itself.

I rested a moment to refill my pipe, then resumed rifle and pack, and cautiously started to skirt the cliffs. I had descended half-way towards the beech, and was examining the cliff opposite, when something on the very top of the rock arrested my attention—a man darkly outlined against the sky. The next moment, however, I knew it could not be a man, for the object suddenly glided over the face of the cliff and slid down the sheer, smooth lace like a lizard. Before I could get a square look at it, the thing crawled into the surf—or, at least, it seemed to—but the whole episode occurred so suddenly, so unexpectedly, that I was not sure I had seen anything at all.

However, I was curious enough to climb the cliff on the land side and make my way towards the spot where I imagined I saw the man. Of course, there was nothing there—not a trace of a human being, I mean. Something *had* been there—a sea-otter, possibly—for the remains of a freshly killed fish lay on the rock, eaten to the back-bone and tail.

The next moment, below me, I saw the house, a freshly painted, trim, flimsy structure, modern, and very much out of harmony with

the splendid savagery surrounding it. It struck a nasty, cheap note in the noble, gray monotony of headland and sea.

The descent was easy enough. I crossed the crescent beach, hard as pink marble, and found a little trodden path among the rocks, that led to the front porch of the house.

There were two people on the porch—I heard their voices before I saw them—and when I set my foot upon the wooden steps, I saw one of them, a woman, rise from her chair and step hastily towards me.

"Come back!" cried the other, a man with a smooth-shaven, deeply lined face, and a pair of angry, blue eyes; and the woman stepped back quietly, acknowledging my lifted hat with a silent inclination.

The man, who was reclining in an invalid's rolling-chair, clapped both large, pale hands to the wheels and pushed himself out along the porch. He had shawls pinned about him, an untidy, drab-colored hat on his head, and, when he looked down at me, he scowled.

"I know who you are," he said, in his acid voice; "you're one of the Zoological men from Bronx Park. You look like it, anyway."

"It is easy to recognize you from your reputation," I replied, irritated at his discourtesy.

"Really," he replied, with something between a sneer and a laugh, "I'm obliged for your frankness. You're after my great auks, are you not?"

"Nothing else would have tempted me into this place," I replied, sincerely.

"Thank Heaven for that," he said. "Sit down a moment; you've interrupted us." Then, turning to the young woman, who wore the neat gown and tiny cap of a professional nurse, he bade her resume what she had been saying. She did so, with deprecating glance at me, which made the old man sneer again.

"It happened so suddenly," she said, in her low voice, "that I had no chance to get back. The boat was drifting in the cove; I sat in the stern, reading, both oars shipped, and the tiller swinging. Then I heard a scratching under the boat, but thought it might be sea-weed—and, next moment, came those soft thumpings, like the sound of a big fish rubbing its nose against a float."

Halyard clutched the wheels of his chair and stared at the girl in grim displeasure.

"Didn't you know enough to be frightened?" he demanded.

"No—not then," she said, coloring faintly; "but when, after a few moments, I looked up and saw the harbor-master running up and down the beach, I was horribly frightened."

"Really?" said Halyard, sarcastically; "it was about time." Then, turning to me, he rasped out: "And that young lady was obliged to row all the way to Port-of-Waves and call to Lee's quarrymen to take her boat in."

Completely mystified, I looked from Halyard to the girl, not in the least comprehending what all this meant.

"That will do," said Halyard, ungraciously, which curt phrase was apparently the usual dismissal for the nurse.

She rose, and I rose, and she passed me with an inclination, stepping noiselessly into the house.

"I want beef-tea!" bawled Halyard after her; then he gave me an unamiable glance.

"I was a well-bred man," he sneered; "I'm a Harvard graduate, too, but I live as I like, and I do what I like, and I say what I like."

"You certainly are not reticent," I said, disgusted.

"Why should I be?" he rasped; "I pay that young woman for my irritability; it's a bargain between us."

"In your domestic affairs," I said, "there is nothing that interests me. I came to see those auks."

"You probably believe them to be razor-billed auks," he said, contemptuously. "But they're not; they're great auks."

I suggested that he permit me to examine them, and he replied, indifferently, that they were in a pen in his backyard, and that I was free to step around the house when I cared to.

I laid my rifle and pack on the veranda, and hastened off with mixed emotions, among which hope no longer predominated. No man in his senses would keep two such precious prizes in a pen in his backyard, I argued, and I was perfectly prepared to find anything from a puffin to a penguin in that pen.

I shall never forget, as long as I live, my stupor of amazement when I came to the wire-covered enclosure. Not only were there two

great auks in the pen, alive, breathing, squatting in bulky majesty on their sea-weed bed, but one of them was gravely contemplating two newly hatched chicks, all bill and feet, which nestled sedately at the edge of a puddle of salt-water, where some small fish were swimming.

For a while excitement blinded, nay, deafened me. I tried to realize that I was gazing upon the last individuals of an all but extinct race—the sole survivors of the gigantic auk, which, for thirty years, has been accounted an extinct creature.

I believe that I did not move muscle nor limb until the sun had gone down and the crowding darkness blurred my straining eyes and blotted the great, silent, bright-eyed birds from sight.

Even then I could not tear myself away from the enclosure; I listened to the strange, drowsy note of the male bird, the fainter responses of the female, the thin plaints of the chicks, huddling under her breast; I heard their flipper-like, embryotic wings beating sleepily as the birds stretched and yawned their beaks and clacked them, preparing for slumber.

"If you please," came a soft voice from the door, "Mr. Halyard awaits your company to dinner."

Chapter 4

I dined well—or, rather, I might have enjoyed my dinner if Mr. Halyard had been eliminated; and the feast consisted exclusively of a joint of beef, the pretty nurse, and myself. She was exceedingly attractive—with a disturbing fashion of lowering her head and raising her dark eyes when spoken to.

As for Halyard, he was unspeakable, bundled up in his snuffy shawls, and making uncouth noises over his gruel. But it is only just to say that his table was worth sitting down to and his wine was sound as a bell.

"Yah!" he snapped, "I'm sick of this cursed soup—and I'll trouble you to fill my glass—"

"It is dangerous for you to touch claret," said the pretty nurse.

"I might as well die at dinner as anywhere," he observed.

"Certainly," said I, cheerfully passing the decanter, but he did not appear overpleased with the attention.

"I can't smoke, either," he snarled, hitching the shawls around until he looked like Richard the Third.

However, he was good enough to shove a box of cigars at me, and I took one and stood up, as the pretty nurse slipped past and vanished into the little parlor beyond.

We sat there for a while without speaking. He picked irritably at the bread-crumbs on the cloth, never glancing in my direction; and I, tired from my long foot-tour, lay back in my chair, silently appreciating one of the best cigars I ever smoked.

"Well," he rasped out at length, "what do you think of my auks—and my veracity?"

I told him that both were unimpeachable.

"Didn't they call me a swindler down there at your museum?" he demanded.

I admitted that I had heard the term applied. Then I made a clean breast of the matter, telling him that it was I who had doubted; that my chief, Professor Farrago, had sent me against my will, and that I was ready and glad to admit that he, Mr. Halyard, was a benefactor of the human race.

"Bosh!" he said. "What good does a confounded wobbly, bandy-toed bird do to the human race?"

But he was pleased, nevertheless; and presently he asked me, not unamiably, to punish his claret again.

"I'm done for," he said; "good things to eat and drink are no good to me. Some day I'll get mad enough to have a fit, and then—"

He paused to yawn.

"Then," he continued, "that little nurse of mine will drink up my claret and go back to civilization, where people are polite."

Somehow or other, in spite of the fact that Halyard was an old pig, what he said touched me. There was certainly not much left in life for him—as he regarded life.

"I'm going to leave her this house," he said, arranging his shawls. "She doesn't know it. I'm going to leave her my money, too. She doesn't know that. Good Lord! What kind of a woman can she be to stand my bad temper for a few dollars a month!"

"I think," said I, "that it's partly because she's poor, partly because she's sorry for you."

He looked up with a ghastly smile.

"You think she really is sorry?"

Before I could answer he went on: "I'm no mawkish sentimentalist, and I won't allow anybody to be sorry for me—do you hear?"

"Oh, I'm not sorry for you!" I said, hastily, and, for the first time since I had seen him, he laughed heartily, without a sneer.

We both seemed to feel better after that; I drank his wine and smoked his cigars, and he appeared to take a certain grim pleasure in watching me.

"There's no fool like a young fool," he observed, presently.

As I had no doubt he referred to me, I paid him no attention.

After fidgeting with his shawls, he gave me an oblique scowl and asked me my age.

"Twenty-four," I replied.

"Sort of a tadpole, aren't you?" he said.

As I took no offence, he repeated the remark.

"Oh, come," said I, "there's no use in trying to irritate me. I see through you; a row acts like a cocktail on you—but you'll have to stick to gruel in my company."

"I call that impudence!" he rasped out, wrathfully.

"I don't care what you call it," I replied, undisturbed, "I am not going to be worried by you. Anyway," I ended, "it is my opinion that you could be very good company if you chose."

The proposition appeared to take his breath away—at least, he said nothing more; and I finished my cigar in peace and tossed the stump into a saucer.

"Now," said I, "what price do you set upon your birds, Mr. Halyard?"

"Ten thousand dollars," he snapped, with an evil smile.

"You will receive a certified check when the birds are delivered," I said, quietly.

"You don't mean to say you agree to that outrageous bargain—and I won't take a cent less, either—Good Lord!—haven't you any spirit left?" he cried, half rising from his pile of shawls.

His piteous eagerness for a dispute sent me into laughter impossible to control, and he eyed me, mouth open, animosity rising visibly.

Then he seized the wheels of his invalid chair and trundled away, too mad to speak; and I strolled out into the parlor, still laughing.

The pretty nurse was there, sewing under a hanging lamp.

"If I am not indiscreet—" I began.

"Indiscretion is the better part of valor," said she, dropping her head but raising her eyes.

So I sat down with a frivolous smile peculiar to the appreciated.

"Doubtless," said I, "you are hemming a 'kerchief."

"Doubtless I am not," she said; "this is a night-cap for Mr. Halyard."

A mental vision of Halyard in a night-cap, very mad, nearly set me laughing again.

"Like the King of Yvetot, he wears his crown in bed," I said, flippantly.

"The King of Yvetot might have made that remark," she observed, re-threading her needle.

It is unpleasant to be reproved. How large and red and hot a man's ears feel.

To cool them, I strolled out to the porch; and, after a while, the pretty nurse came out, too, and sat down in a chair not far away. She probably regretted her lost opportunity to be flirted with.

"I have so little company—it is a great relief to see somebody from the world," she said. "If you can be agreeable, I wish you would."

The idea that she had come out to see me was so agreeable that I remained speechless until she said: "Do tell me what people are doing in New York."

So I seated myself on the steps and talked about the portion of the world inhabited by me, while she sat sewing in the dull light that straggled out from the parlor windows.

She had a certain coquetry of her own, using the usual methods with an individuality that was certainly fetching. For instance, when she lost her needle—and, another time, when we both, on hands and knees, hunted for her thimble.

However, directions for these pastimes may be found in contemporary classics.

I was as entertaining as I could be—perhaps not quite as entertaining as a young man usually thinks he is. However, we got on very well together until I asked her tenderly who the harbor-master might be, whom they all discussed so mysteriously.

"I do not care to speak about it," she said, with a primness of which I had not suspected her capable.

Of course I could scarcely pursue the subject after that—and, indeed, I did not intend to—so I began to tell her how I fancied I had seen a man on the cliff that afternoon, and how the creature slid over the sheer rock like a snake.

To my amazement, she asked me to kindly discontinue the account of my adventures, in an icy tone, which left no room for protest.

"It was only a sea-otter," I tried to explain, thinking perhaps she did not care for snake stories.

But the explanation did not appear to interest her, and I was mortified to observe that my impression upon her was anything but pleasant.

"She doesn't seem to like me and my stories," thought I, "but she is too young, perhaps, to appreciate them."

So I forgave her—for she was even prettier than I had thought her at first—and I took my leave, saying that Mr. Halyard would doubtless direct me to my room.

Halyard was in his library, cleaning a revolver, when I entered.

"Your room is next to mine," he said; "pleasant dreams, and kindly refrain from snoring."

"May I venture an absurd hope that you will do the same!" I replied, politely.

That maddened him, so I hastily withdrew.

I had been asleep for at least two hours when a movement by my bedside and a light in my eyes awakened me. I sat bolt upright in bed, blinking at Halyard, who, clad in a dressing-gown and wearing a night-cap, had wheeled himself into my room with one hand, while with the other he solemnly waved a candle over my head.

"I'm so cursed lonely," he said—"come, there's a good fellow—talk to me in your own original, impudent way."

I objected strenuously, but he looked so worn and thin, so lonely and bad-tempered, so lovelessly grotesque, that I got out of bed and passed a spongeful of cold water over my head.

Then I returned to bed and propped the pillows up for a back-rest, ready to quarrel with him if it might bring some little pleasure into his morbid existence.

"No," he said, amiably, "I'm too worried to quarrel, but I'm much obliged for your kindly offer. I want to tell you something."

"What?" I asked, suspiciously.

"I want to ask you if you ever saw a man with gills like a fish?"

"Gills?" I repeated.

"Yes, gills! Did you?"

"No," I replied, angrily, "and neither did you."

"No, I never did," he said, in a curiously placid voice, "but there's a man with gills like a fish who lives in the ocean out there. Oh, you needn't look that way—nobody ever thinks of doubting my word, and I tell you that there's a man—or a thing that looks like a man—as big as you are, too—all slate-colored—with nasty red gills like a fish!—and I've a witness to prove what I say!"

"Who?" I asked, sarcastically.

"The witness? My nurse."

"Oh! She saw a slate-colored man with gills?"

"Yes, she did. So did Francis Lee, superintendent of the Mica Quarry Company at Port-of-Waves. So have a dozen men who work in the quarry. Oh, you needn't laugh, young man. It's an old story here, and anybody can tell you about the harbor-master."

"The harbor-master!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, that slate-colored thing with gills, that looks like a man—and—by Heaven! *is* a man—that's the harbor-master. Ask any quarryman at Port-of-Waves what it is that comes purring around their boats at the wharf and unties painters and changes the mooring of every cat-boat in the cove at night! Ask Francis Lee what it was he saw running and leaping up and down the shoal at sunset last Friday! Ask anybody along the coast what sort of a thing moves about the cliffs like a man and slides over them into the sea like an otter—"

"I saw it do that!" I burst out.

"Oh, did you? Well, *what was it?*"

Something kept me silent, although a dozen explanations flew to my lips.

After a pause, Halyard said: "You saw the harbor-master, that's what you saw!"

I looked at him without a word.

"Don't mistake me," he said, pettishly; "I don't think that the harbor-master is a spirit or a sprite or a hobgoblin, or any sort of damned rot. Neither do I believe it to be an optical illusion."

"What do you think it is?" I asked.

"I think it's a man—I think it's a branch of the human race—that's what I think. Let me tell you something: the deepest spot in the Atlantic Ocean is a trifle over five miles deep—and I suppose you

know that this place lies only about a quarter of a mile off this headland. The British exploring vessel, *Gull*, Captain Marotte, discovered and sounded it, I believe. Anyway, it's there, and it's my belief that the profound depths are inhabited by the remnants of the last race of amphibious human beings!"

This was childish; I did not bother to reply.

"Believe it or not, as you will," he said, angrily; "one thing I know, and that is this: the harbor-master has taken to hanging around my cove, and he is attracted by my nurse! I won't have it! I'll blow his fishy gills out of his head if I ever get a shot at him! I don't care whether it's homicide or not—anyway, it's a new kind of murder and it attracts me!"

I gazed at him incredulously, but he was working himself into a passion, and I did not choose to say what I thought.

"Yes, this slate-colored thing with gills goes purring and grinning and spitting about after my nurse—when she walks, when she rows, when she sits on the beach! Gad! It drives me nearly frantic. I won't tolerate it, I tell you!"

"No," said I, "I wouldn't either." And I rolled over in bed convulsed with laughter.

The next moment I heard my door slam. I smothered my mirth and rose to close the window, for the land-wind blew cold from the forest, and a drizzle was sweeping the carpet as far as my bed.

That luminous glare which sometimes lingers after the stars go out, threw a trembling, nebulous radiance over sand and cove. I heard the seething currents under the breakers' softened thunder—louder than I ever heard it. Then, as I closed my window, lingering for a last look at the crawling tide, I saw a man standing, ankle-deep, in the surf, all alone there in the night. But—was it a man? For the figure suddenly began running over the beach on all fours like a beetle, waving its limbs like feelers. Before I could throw open the window again it darted into the surf, and, when I leaned out into the chilling drizzle, I saw nothing save the flat ebb crawling on the coast —I heard nothing save the purring of bubbles on seething sands.

Chapter 5

It took me a week to perfect my arrangements for transporting the great auks, by water, to Port-of-Waves, where a lumber schooner was to be sent from Petite Sainte Isole, chartered by me for a voyage to New York.

I had constructed a cage made of osiers, in which my auks were to squat until they arrived at Bronx Park. My telegrams to Professor Farrago were brief. One merely said "Victory!" Another explained that I wanted no assistance; and a third read: "Schooner chartered. Arrive New York July 1st. Send furniture-van to foot of Bluff Street."

My week as a guest of Mr. Halyard proved interesting. I wrangled with that invalid to his heart's content, I worked all day on my osier cage, I hunted the thimble in the moonlight with the pretty nurse. We sometimes found it.

As for the thing they called the harbor-master, I saw it a dozen times, but always either at night or so far away and so close to the sea that of course no trace of it remained when I reached the spot, rifle in hand.

I had quite made up my mind that the so-called harbor-master was a demented darky—wandered from, Heaven knows where—perhaps shipwrecked and gone mad from his sufferings. Still, it was far from pleasant to know that the creature was strongly attracted by the pretty nurse.

She, however, persisted in regarding the harbor-master as a sea-creature; she earnestly affirmed that it had gills, like a fish's gills, that it had a soft, fleshy hole for a mouth, and its eyes were luminous and lidless and fixed.

"Besides," she said, with a shudder, "it's all slate color, like a porpoise, and it looks as wet as a sheet of india-rubber in a dissecting-room."

The day before I was to set sail with my auks in a cat-boat bound for Port-of-Waves, Halyard trundled up to me in his chair and announced his intention of going with me.

"Going where?" I asked.

"To Port-of-Waves and then to New York," he replied, tranquilly.

I was doubtful, and my lack of cordiality hurt his feelings.

"Oh, of course, if you need the sea-voyage—" I began.

"I don't; I need you," he said, savagely; "I need the stimulus of our daily quarrel. I never disagreed so pleasantly with anybody in my life; it agrees with me; I am a hundred per cent. better than I was last week."

I was inclined to resent this, but something in the deep-lined face of the invalid softened me. Besides, I had taken a hearty liking to the old pig.

"I don't want any mawkish sentiment about it," he said, observing me closely; "I won't permit anybody to feel sorry for me—do you understand?"

"I'll trouble you to use a different tone in addressing me," I replied, hotly; "I'll feel sorry for you if I choose to!" And our usual quarrel proceeded, to his deep satisfaction.

By six o'clock next evening I had Halyard's luggage stowed away in the cat-boat, and the pretty nurse's effects corded down, with the newly hatched auk-chicks in a hat-box on top. She and I placed the osier cage aboard, securing it firmly, and then, throwing tablecloths over the auks' heads, we led those simple and dignified birds down the path and across the plank at the little wooden pier. Together we locked up the house, while Halyard stormed at us both and wheeled himself furiously up and down the beach below. At the last moment she forgot her thimble. But we found it, I forget where.

"Come on!" shouted Halyard, waving his shawls furiously; "what the devil are you about up there?"

He received our explanation with a sniff, and we trundled him aboard without further ceremony.

"Don't run me across the plank like a steamer trunk!" he shouted, as I shot him dexterously into the cock-pit. But the wind was dying away, and I had no time to dispute with him then.

The sun was setting above the pine-clad ridge as our sail flapped and partly filled, and I cast off, and began a long tack, east by south, to avoid the spouting rocks on our starboard bow.

The sea-birds rose in clouds as we swung across the shoal, the black surf-ducks scuttered out to sea, the gulls tossed their sun-tipped wings in the ocean, riding the rollers like bits of froth.

Already we were sailing slowly out across that great hole in the ocean, five miles deep, the most profound sounding ever taken in the Atlantic. The presence of great heights or great depths, seen or unseen, always impresses the human mind—perhaps oppresses it. We were very silent; the sunlight stain on cliff and beach deepened to crimson, then faded into sombre purple bloom that lingered long after the rose-tint died out in the zenith.

Our progress was slow; at times, although the sail filled with the rising land breeze, we scarcely seemed to move at all.

"Of course," said the pretty nurse, "we couldn't be aground in the deepest hole in the Atlantic."

"Scarcely," said Halyard, sarcastically, "unless we're grounded on a whale."

"What's that soft thumping?" I asked. "Have we run afoul of a barrel or log?"

It was almost too dark to see, but I leaned over the rail and swept the water with my hand.

Instantly something smooth glided under it, like the back of a great fish, and I jerked my hand back to the tiller. At the same moment the whole surface of the water seemed to begin to purr, with a sound like the breaking of froth in a champagne-glass.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Halyard, sharply.

"A fish came up under my hand," I said; "a porpoise or something —"

With a low cry, the pretty nurse clasped my arm in both her hands.

"Listen!" she whispered. "It's purring around the boat."

"What the devil's purring?" shouted Halyard. "I won't have anything purring around me!"

At that moment, to my amazement, I saw that the boat had stopped entirely, although the sail was full and the small pennant fluttered from the mast-head. Something, too, was tugging at the rudder, twisting and jerking it until the tiller strained and creaked in my hand. All at once it snapped; the tiller swung useless and the boat whirled around, heeling in the stiffening wind, and drove shoreward.

It was then that I, ducking to escape the boom, caught a glimpse of something ahead—something that a sudden wave seemed to toss on deck and leave there, wet and flapping—a man with round, fixed, fishy eyes, and soft, slaty skin.

But the horror of the thing were the two gills that swelled and relaxed spasmodically, emitting a rasping, purring sound—two gasping, blood-red gills, all fluted and scolloped and distended.

Frozen with amazement and repugnance, I stared at the creature; I felt the hair stirring on my head and the icy sweat on my forehead.

"It's the harbor-master!" screamed Halyard.

The harbor-master had gathered himself into a wet lump, squatting motionless in the bows under the mast; his lidless eyes were phosphorescent, like the eyes of living codfish. After a while I felt that either fright or disgust was going to strangle me where I sat, but it was only the arms of the pretty nurse clasped around me in a frenzy of terror.

There was not a fire-arm aboard that we could get at. Halyard's hand crept backward where a steel-shod boat-hook lay, and I also made a clutch at it. The next moment I had it in my hand, and staggered forward, but the boat was already tumbling shoreward among the breakers, and the next I knew the harbor-master ran at me like a colossal rat, just as the boat rolled over and over through the surf, spilling freight and passengers among the sea-weed-covered rocks.

When I came to myself I was thrashing about knee-deep in a rocky pool, blinded by the water and half suffocated, while under my feet, like a stranded porpoise, the harbor-master made the water boil in his efforts to upset me. But his limbs seemed soft and boneless; he had no nails, no teeth, and he bounced and thumped and flapped and splashed like a fish, while I rained blows on him with the boat-

hook that sounded like blows on a football. And all the while his gills were blowing out and frothing, and purring, and his lidless eyes looked into mine, until, nauseated and trembling, I dragged myself back to the beach, where already the pretty nurse alternately wrung her hands and her petticoats in ornamental despair.

Beyond the cove, Halyard was bobbing up and down, afloat in his invalid's chair, trying to steer shoreward. He was the maddest man I ever saw.

"Have you killed that rubber-headed thing yet?" he roared.

"I can't kill it," I shouted, breathlessly. "I might as well try to kill a football!"

"Can't you punch a hole in it?" he bawled. "If I can only get at him __"

His words were drowned in a thunderous splashing, a roar of great, broad flippers beating the sea, and I saw the gigantic forms of my two great auks, followed by their chicks, blundering past in a shower of spray, driving headlong out into the ocean.

"Oh, Lord!" I said. "I can't stand that," and, for the first time in my life, I fainted peacefully—and appropriately—at the feet of the pretty nurse.

It is within the range of possibility that this story may be doubted. It doesn't matter; nothing can add to the despair of a man who has lost two great auks.

As for Halyard, nothing affects him—except his involuntary sea-bath, and that did him so much good that he writes me from the South that he's going on a walking-tour through Switzerland—if I'll join him. I might have joined him if he had not married the pretty nurse. I wonder whether—But, of course, this is no place for speculation.

In regard to the harbor-master, you may believe it or not, as you choose. But if you hear of any great auks being found, kindly throw a table-cloth over their heads and notify the authorities at the new Zoological Gardens in Bronx Park, New York. The reward is ten thousand dollars.

Chapter 6

Before I proceed any further, common decency requires me to reassure my readers concerning my intentions, which, Heaven knows, are far from flippant.

To separate fact from fancy has always been difficult for me, but now that I have had the honor to be chosen secretary of the Zoological Gardens in Bronx Park, I realize keenly that unless I give up writing fiction nobody will believe what I write about science. Therefore it is to a serious and unimaginative public that I shall hereafter address myself; and I do it in the modest confidence that I shall neither be distrusted nor doubted, although unfortunately I still write in that irrational style which suggests covert frivolity, and for which I am undergoing a course of treatment in English literature at Columbia College. Now, having promised to avoid originality and confine myself to facts, I shall tell what I have to tell concerning the dingue, the mammoth, and—something else.

For some weeks it had been rumored that Professor Farrago, president of the Bronx Park Zoological Society, would resign, to accept an enormous salary as manager of Barnum & Bailey's circus. He was now with the circus in London, and had promised to cable his decision before the day was over.

I hoped he would decide to remain with us. I was his secretary and particular favorite, and I viewed, without enthusiasm, the advent of a new president, who might shake us all out of our congenial and carefully excavated ruts. However, it was plain that the trustees of the society expected the resignation of Professor Farrago, for they had been in secret session all day, considering the names of

possible candidates to fill Professor Farrago's large, old-fashioned shoes. These preparations worried me, for I could scarcely expect another chief as kind and considerate as Professor Leonidas Farrago.

That afternoon in June I left my office in the Administration Building in Bronx Park and strolled out under the trees for a breath of air. But the heat of the sun soon drove me to seek shelter under a little square arbor, a shady retreat covered with purple wistaria and honeysuckle. As I entered the arbor I noticed that there were three other people seated there—an elderly lady with masculine features and short hair, a younger lady sitting beside her, and, farther away, a rough-looking young man reading a book.

For a moment I had an indistinct impression of having met the elder lady somewhere, and under circumstances not entirely agreeable, but beyond a stony and indifferent glance she paid no attention to me. As for the younger lady, she did not look at me at all. She was very young, with pretty eyes, a mass of silky brown hair, and a skin as fresh as a rose which had just been rained on.

With that delicacy peculiar to lonely scientific bachelors, I modestly sat down beside the rough young man, although there was more room beside the younger lady. "Some lazy loafer reading a penny dreadful," I thought, glancing at him, then at the title of his book. Hearing me beside him, he turned around and blinked over his shabby shoulder, and the movement uncovered the page he had been silently conning. The volume in his hands was Darwin's famous monograph on the monodactyl.

He noticed the astonishment on my face and smiled uneasily, shifting the short clay pipe in his mouth.

"I guess," he observed, "that this here book is too much for me, mister."

"It's rather technical," I replied, smiling.

"Yes," he said, in vague admiration; "it's fierce, ain't it?"

After a silence I asked him if he would tell me why he had chosen Darwin as a literary pastime.

"Well," he said, placidly, "I was tryin' to read about annermals, but I'm up against a word-slinger this time all right. Now here's a gum-

twister," and he painfully spelled out m-o-n-o-d-a-c-t-y-l, breathing hard all the while.

"Monodactyl," I said, "means a single-toed creature."

He turned the page with alacrity. "Is that the beast he's talkin' about?" he asked.

The illustration he pointed out was a wood-cut representing Darwin's reconstruction of the dingue from the fossil bones in the British Museum. It was a well-executed wood-cut, showing a dingue in the foreground and, to give scale, a mammoth in the middle distance.

"Yes," I replied, "that is the dingue."

"I've seen one," he observed, calmly.

I smiled and explained that the dingue had been extinct for some thousands of years.

"Oh, I guess not," he replied, with cool optimism. Then he placed a grimy forefinger on the mammoth.

"I've seen them things, too," he remarked.

Again I patiently pointed out his error, and suggested that he referred to the elephant.

"Elephant be blowed!" he replied, scornfully. "I guess I know what I seen. An' I seen that there thing you call a dingue, too."

Not wishing to prolong a futile discussion, I remained silent. After a moment he wheeled around, removing his pipe from his hard mouth.

"Did you ever hear tell of Graham's Glacier?" he demanded.

"Certainly," I replied, astonished; "it's the southernmost glacier in British America."

"Right," he said. "And did you ever hear tell of the Hudson Mountings, mister?"

"Yes," I replied.

"What's behind 'em?" he snapped out.

"Nobody knows," I answered. "They are considered impassable."

"They ain't, though," he said, doggedly; "I've been behind 'em."

"Really!" I replied, tiring of his yarn.

"Ya-as, reely," he repeated, sullenly. Then he began to fumble and search through the pages of his book until he found what he wanted. "Mister," he said, "jest read that out loud, please."

The passage he indicated was the famous chapter beginning:

"Is the mammoth extinct? Is the dingue extinct? Probably. And yet the aborigines of British America maintain the contrary. Probably both the mammoth and the dingue are extinct; but until expeditions have penetrated and explored not only the unknown region in Alaska but also that hidden table-land beyond the Graham Glacier and the Hudson Mountains, it will not be possible to definitely announce the total extinction of either the mammoth or the dingue."

When I had read it, slowly, for his benefit, he brought his hand down smartly on one knee and nodded rapidly.

"Mister," he said, "that gent knows a thing or two, and don't you forgit it!" Then he demanded, abruptly, how I knew he hadn't been behind the Graham Glacier.

I explained.

"Shucks!" he said; "there's a road five miles wide inter that there table-land. Mister, I ain't been in New York long; I come inter port a week ago on the *Arctic Belle*, whaler. I was in the Hudson range when that there Graham Glacier bust up—"

"What!" I exclaimed.

"Didn't you know it?" he asked. "Well, mebbe it ain't in the papers, but it busted all right—blowed up by a earthquake an' volcano combine. An', mister, it was oreful. My, how I did run!"

"Do you mean to tell me that some convulsion of the earth has shattered the Graham Glacier?" I asked.

"Convulsions? Ya-as, an' fits, too," he said, sulkily. "The hull blame thing dropped inter a hole. An' say, mister, home an' mother is good enough fur me now."

I stared at him stupidly.

"Once," he said, "I ketched pelts fur them sharps at Hudson Bay, like any yaller husky, but the things I seen arter that convulsion-fit—the *things I seen behind the Hudson Mountings*—don't make me hanker arter no life on the pe-rarie wild, lemme tell yer. I may be a Mother Carey chicken, but this chicken has got enough."

After a long silence I picked up his book again and pointed at the picture of the mammoth.

"What color is it?" I asked.

"Kinder red an' brown," he answered, promptly. "It's woolly, too."

Astounded, I pointed to the dingue.

"One-toed," he said, quickly; "makes a noise like a bell when scutterin' about."

Intensely excited, I laid my hand on his arm. "My society will give you a thousand dollars," I said, "if you pilot me inside the Hudson table-land and show me either a mammoth or a dingue!"

He looked me calmly in the eye.

"Mister," he said, slowly, "have you got a million for to squander on me?"

"No," I said, suspiciously.

"Because," he went on, "it wouldn't be enough. Home an' mother suits me now."

He picked up his book and rose. In vain I asked his name and address; in vain I begged him to dine with me—to become my honored guest.

"Nit," he said, shortly, and shambled off down the path.

But I was not going to lose him like that. I rose and deliberately started to stalk him. It was easy. He shuffled along, pulling on his pipe, and I after him.

It was growing a little dark, although the sun still reddened the tops of the maples. Afraid of losing him in the falling dusk, I once more approached him and laid my hand upon his ragged sleeve.

"Look here," he cried, wheeling about, "I want you to quit follerin' me. Don't I tell you money can't make me go back to them mountings!" And as I attempted to speak, he suddenly tore off his cap and pointed to his head. His hair was white as snow.

"That's what come of monkeyin' inter your cursed mountings," he shouted, fiercely. "There's things in there what no Christian oughter see. Lemme alone er I'll bust yer."

He shambled on, doubled fists swinging by his side. The next moment, setting my teeth obstinately, I followed him and caught him by the park gate. At my hail he whirled around with a snarl, but I grabbed him by the throat and backed him violently against the park wall.

"You invaluable ruffian," I said, "now you listen to me. I live in that big stone building, and I'll give you a thousand dollars to take me behind the Graham Glacier. Think it over and call on me when you

are in a pleasanter frame of mind. If you don't come by noon to-morrow I'll go to the Graham Glacier without you."

He was attempting to kick me all the time, but I managed to avoid him, and when I had finished I gave him a shove which almost loosened his spinal column. He went reeling out across the sidewalk, and when he had recovered his breath and his balance he danced with displeasure and displayed a vocabulary that astonished me. However, he kept his distance.

As I turned back into the park, satisfied that he would not follow, the first person I saw was the elderly, stony-faced lady of the wistaria arbor advancing on tiptoe. Behind her came the younger lady with cheeks like a rose that had been rained on.

Instantly it occurred to me that they had followed us, and at the same moment I knew who the stony-faced lady was. Angry, but polite, I lifted my hat and saluted her, and she, probably furious at having been caught tip-toeing after me, cut me dead. The younger lady passed me with face averted, but even in the dusk I could see the tip of one little ear turn scarlet.

Walking on hurriedly, I entered the Administration Building, and found Professor Lesard, of the reptilian department, preparing to leave.

"Don't you do it," I said, sharply; "I've got exciting news."

"I'm only going to the theatre," he replied. "It's a good show—Adam and Eve; there's a snake in it, you know. It's in my line."

"I can't help it," I said; and I told him briefly what had occurred in the arbor.

"But that's not all," I continued, savagely. "Those women followed us, and who do you think one of them turned out to be? Well, it was Professor Smawl, of Barnard College, and I'll bet every pair of boots I own that she starts for the Graham Glacier within a week. Idiot that I was!" I exclaimed, smiting my head with both hands. "I never recognized her until I saw her tip-toeing and craning her neck to listen. Now she knows about the glacier; she heard every word that young ruffian said, and she'll go to the glacier if it's only to forestall me."

Professor Lesard looked anxious. He knew that Miss Smawl, professor of natural history at Barnard College, had long desired an

appointment at the Bronx Park gardens. It was even said she had a chance of succeeding Professor Farrago as president, but that, of course, must have been a joke. However, she haunted the gardens, annoying the keepers by persistently poking the animals with her umbrella. On one occasion she sent us word that she desired to enter the tigers' enclosure for the purpose of making experiments in hypnotism. Professor Farrago was absent, but I took it upon myself to send back word that I feared the tigers might injure her. The miserable small boy who took my message informed her that I was afraid she might injure the tigers, and the unpleasant incident almost cost me my position.

"I am quite convinced," said I to Professor Lesard, "that Miss Smawl is perfectly capable of abusing the information she overheard, and of starting herself to explore a region that, by all the laws of decency, justice, and prior claim, belongs to me."

"Well," said Lesard, with a peculiar laugh, "it's not certain whether you can go at all."

"Professor Farrago will authorize me," I said, confidently.

"Professor Farrago has resigned," said Lesard. It was a bolt from a clear sky.

"Good Heavens!" I blurted out. "What will become of the rest of us, then?"

"I don't know," he replied. "The trustees are holding a meeting over in the Administration Building to elect a new president for us. It depends on the new president what becomes of us."

"Lesard," I said, hoarsely, "you don't suppose that they could possibly elect Miss Smawl as our president, do you?"

He looked at me askance and bit his cigar.

"I'd be in a nice position, wouldn't I?" said I, anxiously.

"The lady would probably make you walk the plank for that tiger business," he replied.

"But I didn't do it," I protested, with sickly eagerness. "Besides, I explained to her—"

He said nothing, and I stared at him, appalled by the possibility of reporting to Professor Smawl for instructions next morning.

"See here, Lesard," I said, nervously, "I wish you would step over to the Administration Building and ask the trustees if I may prepare

for this expedition. Will you?"

He glanced at me sympathetically. It was quite natural for me to wish to secure my position before the new president was elected—especially as there was a chance of the new president being Miss Smawl.

"You are quite right," he said; "the Graham Glacier would be the safest place for you if our next president is to be the Lady of the Tigers." And he started across the park puffing his cigar.

I sat down on the doorstep to wait for his return, not at all charmed with the prospect. It made me furious, too, to see my ambition nipped with the frost of a possible veto from Miss Smawl.

"If she is elected," thought I, "there is nothing for me but to resign—to avoid the inconvenience of being shown the door. Oh, I wish I had allowed her to hypnotize the tigers!"

Thoughts of crime flitted through my mind. Miss Smawl would not remain president—or anything else very long—if she persisted in her desire for the tigers. And then when she called for help I would pretend not to hear.

Aroused from criminal meditation by the return of Professor Lesard, I jumped up and peered into his perplexed eyes. "They've elected a president," he said, "but they won't tell us who the president is until to-morrow."

"You don't think—" I stammered.

"I don't know. But I know this: the new president sanctions the expedition to the Graham Glacier, and directs you to choose an assistant and begin preparations for four people."

Overjoyed, I seized his hand and said, "Hurray!" in a voice weak with emotion. "The old dragon isn't elected this time," I added, triumphantly.

"By-the-way," he said, "who was the other dragon with her in the park this evening?"

I described her in a more modulated voice.

"Whew!" observed Professor Lesard, "that must be her assistant, Professor Dorothy Van Twiller! She's the prettiest blue-stocking in town."

With this curious remark my confrère followed me into my room and wrote down the list of articles I dictated to him. The list included

a complete camping equipment for myself and three other men.

"Am I one of those other men?" inquired Lesard, with an unhappy smile.

Before I could reply my door was shoved open and a figure appeared at the threshold, cap in hand.

"What do you want?" I asked, sternly; but my heart was beating high with triumph.

The figure shuffled; then came a subdued voice:

"Mister, I guess I'll go back to the Graham Glacier along with you. I'm Billy Spike, an' it kinder scares me to go back to them Hudson Mountains, but somehow, mister, when you choked me and kinder walked me off on my ear, why, mister, I kinder took to you like."

There was absolute silence for a minute; then he said:

"So if you go, I guess I'll go, too, mister."

"For a thousand dollars?"

"Fur nawthin'," he muttered—"or what you like."

"All right, Billy," I said, briskly; "just look over those rifles and ammunition and see that everything's sound."

He slowly lifted his tough young face and gave me a doglike glance. They were hard eyes, but there was gratitude in them.

"You'll get your throat slit," whispered Lesard.

"Not while Billy's with me," I replied, cheerfully.

Late that night, as I was preparing for pleasant dreams, a knock came on my door and a telegraph-messenger handed me a note, which I read, shivering in my bare feet, although the thermometer marked eighty Fahrenheit:

"You will immediately leave for the Hudson Mountains via Wellman Bay, Labrador, there to await further instructions. Equipment for yourself and one assistant will include following articles" [here began a list of camping utensils, scientific paraphernalia, and provisions]. "The steamer *Penguin* sails at five o'clock to-morrow morning. Kindly find yourself on board at that hour. Any excuse for not complying with these orders will be accepted as your resignation.

"SUSAN SMAWL, "President Bronx Zoological Society."

"Lesard!" I shouted, trembling with fury.

He appeared at his door, chastely draped in pajamas; and he read the insolent letter with terrified alacrity.

"What are you going to do—resign?" he asked, much frightened.

"Do!" I snarled, grinding my teeth; "I'm going—that's what I'm going to do!"

"But—but you can't get ready and catch that steamer, too," he stammered.

He did not know me.

Chapter 7

And so it came about that one calm evening towards the end of June, William Spike and I went into camp under the southerly shelter of that vast granite wall called the Hudson Mountains, there to await the promised "further instructions."

It had been a tiresome trip by steamer to Anticosti, from there by schooner to Widgeon Bay, then down the coast and up the Cape Clear River to Port Porpoise. There we bought three pack-mules and started due north on the Great Fur Trail. The second day out we passed Fort Boisé, the last outpost of civilization, and on the sixth day we were travelling eastward under the granite mountain parapets.

On the evening of the sixth day out from Fort Boisé we went into camp for the last time before entering the unknown land.

I could see it already through my field-glasses, and while William was building the fire I climbed up among the rocks above and sat down, glasses levelled, to study the prospect.

There was nothing either extraordinary or forbidding in the landscape which stretched out beyond; to the right the solid palisade of granite cut off the view; to the left the palisade continued, an endless barrier of sheer cliffs crowned with pine and hemlock. But the interesting section of the landscape lay almost directly in front of me—a rent in the mountain-wall through which appeared to run a level, arid plain, miles wide, and as smooth and even as a highroad.

There could be no doubt concerning the significance of that rent in the solid mountain-wall; and, moreover, it was exactly as William

Spike had described it. However, I called to him and he came up from the smoky camp-fire, axe on shoulder.

"Yep," he said, squatting beside me; "the Graham Glacier used to meander through that there hole, but somethin' went wrong with the earth's in'ards an' there was a bust-up."

"And you saw it, William?" I said, with a sigh of envy.

"Hey? Seen it? Sure I seen it! I was to Spoutin' Springs, twenty mile west, with a bale o' blue fox an' otter pelt. Fust I knew them geysers begun for to groan egregious like, an' I seen the caribou gallopin' hell-bent south. 'This climate,' sez I, 'is too bracin' for me,' so I struck a back trail an' landed onto a hill. Then them geysers blowed up, one arter the next, an' I heard somethin' kinder cave in between here an' China. I disremember things what happened. Somethin' throwed me down, but I couldn't stay there, for the blamed ground was runnin' like a river—all wavy-like, an' the sky hit me on the back o' me head."

"And then?" I urged, in that new excitement which every repetition of the story revived. I had heard it all twenty times since we left New York, but mere repetition could not apparently satisfy me.

"Then," continued William, "the whole world kinder went off like a fire-cracker, an' I come too, an' ran like—"

"I know," said I, cutting him short, for I had become wearied of the invariable profanity which lent a lurid ending to his narrative.

"After that," I continued, "you went through the rent in the mountains?"

"Sure."

"And you saw a dingue and a creature that resembled a mammoth?"

"Sure," he repeated, sulkily.

"And you saw something else?" I always asked this question; it fascinated me to see the sullen fright flicker in William's eyes, and the mechanical backward glance, as though what he had seen might still be behind him.

He had never answered this third question but once, and that time he fairly snarled in my face as he growled: "I seen what no Christian oughter see."

So when I repeated: "And you saw something else, William?" he gave me a wicked, frightened leer, and shuffled off to feed the mules. Flattery, entreaties, threats left him unmoved; he never told me what the third thing was that he had seen behind the Hudson Mountains.

William had retired to mix up with his mules; I resumed my binoculars and my silent inspection of the great, smooth path left by the Graham Glacier when something or other exploded that vast mass of ice into vapor.

The arid plain wound out from the unknown country like a river, and I thought then, and think now, that when the glacier was blown into vapor the vapor descended in the most terrific rain the world has ever seen, and poured through the newly blasted mountain-gateway, sweeping the earth to bed-rock. To corroborate this theory, miles to the southward I could see the débris winding out across the land towards Wellman Bay, but as the terminal moraine of the vanished glacier formerly ended there I could not be certain that my theory was correct. Owing to the formation of the mountains I could not see more than half a mile into the unknown country. What I could see appeared to be nothing but the continuation of the glacier's path, scored out by the cloud-burst, and swept as smooth as a floor.

Sitting there, my heart beating heavily with excitement, I looked through the evening glow at the endless, pine-crowned mountain-wall with its giant's gateway pierced for me! And I thought of all the explorers and the unknown heroes—trappers, Indians, humble naturalists, perhaps—who had attempted to scale that sheer barricade and had died there or failed, beaten back from those eternal cliffs. Eternal? No! For the Eternal Himself had struck the rock, and it had sprung asunder, thundering obedience.

In the still evening air the smoke from the fire below mounted in a straight, slender pillar, like the smoke from those ancient altars builded before the first blood had been shed on earth.

The evening wind stirred the pines; a tiny spring brook made thin harmony among the rocks; a murmur came from the quiet camp. It was William adjuring his mules. In the deepening twilight I descended the hillock, stepping cautiously among the rocks.

Then, suddenly, as I stood outside the reddening ring of firelight, far in the depths of the unknown country, far behind the mountain-

wall, a sound grew on the quiet air. William heard it and turned his face to the mountains. The sound faded to a vibration which was felt, not heard. Then once more I began to divine a vibration in the air, gathering in distant volume until it became a sound, lasting the space of a spoken word, fading to vibration, then silence.

Was it a cry?

I looked at William inquiringly. He had quietly fainted away.

I got him to the little brook and poked his head into the icy water, and after a while he sat up pluckily.

To an indignant question he replied: "Naw, I ain't a-cussin' you. Lemme be or I'll have fits."

"Was it that sound that scared you?" I asked.

"Ya-as," he replied with a dauntless shiver.

"Was it the voice of the mammoth?" I persisted, excitedly. "Speak, William, or I'll drag you about and kick you!"

He replied that it was neither a mammoth nor a dingue, and added a strong request for privacy, which I was obliged to grant, as I could not torture another word out of him.

I slept little that night; the exciting proximity of the unknown land was too much for me. But although I lay awake for hours, I heard nothing except the tinkle of water among the rocks and the plover calling from some hidden marsh. At daybreak I shot a ptarmigan which had walked into camp, and the shot set the echoes yelling among the mountains.

William, sullen and heavy-eyed, dressed the bird, and we broiled it for breakfast.

Neither he nor I alluded to the sound we had heard the night before; he boiled water and cleaned up the mess-kit, and I pottered about among the rocks for another ptarmigan. Wearying of this, presently, I returned to the mules and William, and sat down for a smoke.

"It strikes me," I said, "that our instructions to 'await further orders' are idiotic. How are we to receive 'further orders' here?"

William did not know.

"You don't suppose," said I, in sudden disgust, "that Miss Smawl believes there is a summer hotel and daily mail service in the Hudson Mountains?"

William thought perhaps she did suppose something of the sort.

It irritated me beyond measure to find myself at last on the very border of the unknown country, and yet checked, held back, by the irresponsible orders of a maiden lady named Smawl. However, my salary depended upon the whim of that maiden lady, and although I fussed and fumed and glared at the mountains through my glasses, I realized that I could not stir without the permission of Miss Smawl. At times this grotesque situation became almost unbearable, and I often went away by myself and indulged in fantasies, firing my gun off and pretending I had hit Miss Smawl by mistake. At such moments I would imagine I was free at last to plunge into the strange country, and I would squat on a rock and dream of bagging my first mammoth.

The time passed heavily; the tension increased with each new day. I shot ptarmigan and kept our table supplied with brook-trout. William chopped wood, conversed with his mules, and cooked very badly.

"See here," I said, one morning; "we have been in camp a week to-day, and I can't stand your cooking another minute!"

William, who was washing a saucepan, looked up and begged me sarcastically to accept the *cordon bleu*. But I know only how to cook eggs, and there were no eggs within some hundred miles.

To get the flavor of the breakfast out of my mouth I walked up to my favorite hillock and sat down for a smoke. The next moment, however, I was on my feet, cheering excitedly and shouting for William.

"Here come 'further instructions' at last!" I cried, pointing to the southward, where two dots on the grassy plain were imperceptibly moving in our direction.

"People on mules," said William, without enthusiasm.

"They must be messengers for us!" I cried, in chaste joy. "Three cheers for the northward trail, William, and the mischief take Miss— Well, never mind now," I added.

"On them approachin' mules," observed William, "there is wimmen."

I stared at him for a second, then attempted to strike him. He dodged wearily and repeated his incredible remark: "Ya-as, there is

—wimmen—two female ladies onto them there mules."

"Bring me my glasses!" I said, hoarsely; "bring me those glasses, William, because I shall destroy you if you don't!"

Somewhat awed by my calm fury, he hastened back to camp and returned with the binoculars. It was a breathless moment. I adjusted the lenses with a steady hand and raised them.

Now, of all unexpected sights my fate may reserve for me in the future, I trust—nay, I know—that none can ever prove as unwelcome as the sight I perceived through my binoculars. For upon the backs of those distant mules were two women, and the first one was Miss Smawl!

Upon her head she wore a helmet, from which fluttered a green veil. Otherwise she was clothed in tweeds; and at moments she beat upon her mule with a thick umbrella.

Surfeited with the sickening spectacle, I sat down on a rock and tried to cry.

"I told yer so," observed William; but I was too tired to attack him.

When the caravan rode into camp I was myself again, smilingly prepared for the worst, and I advanced, cap in hand, followed furtively by William.

"Welcome," I said, violently injecting joy into my voice. "Welcome, Professor Smawl, to the Hudson Mountains!"

"Kindly take my mule," she said, climbing down to mother earth.

"William," I said, with dignity, "take the lady's mule."

Miss Smawl gave me a stolid glance, then made directly for the camp-fire, where a kettle of game-broth simmered over the coals. The last I saw of her she was smelling of it, and I turned my back and advanced towards the second lady pilgrim, prepared to be civil until snubbed.

Now, it is quite certain that never before had William Spike or I beheld so much feminine loveliness in one human body on the back of a mule. She was clad in the daintiest of shooting-kilts, yet there was nothing mannish about her except the way she rode the mule, and that only accentuated her adorable femininity.

I remembered what Professor Lesard had said about blue stockings—but Miss Dorothy Van Twiller's were gray, turned over at

the tops, and disappearing into canvas spats buckled across a pair of slim shooting-boots.

"Welcome," said I, attempting to restrain a too violent cordiality. "Welcome, Professor Van Twiller, to the Hudson Mountains."

"Thank you," she replied, accepting my assistance very sweetly; "it is a pleasure to meet a human being again."

I glanced at Miss Smawl. She was eating game-broth, but she resembled a human being in a general way.

"I should very much like to wash my hands," said Professor Van Twiller, drawing the buckskin gloves from her slim fingers.

I brought towels and soap and conducted her to the brook.

She called to Professor Smawl to join her, and her voice was crystalline; Professor Smawl declined, and her voice was batrachian.

"She is so hungry!" observed Miss Van Twiller. "I am very thankful we are here at last, for we've had a horrid time. You see, we neither of us know how to cook."

I wondered what they would say to William's cooking, but I held my peace and retired, leaving the little brook to mirror the sweetest face that was ever bathed in water.

Chapter 8

That afternoon our expedition, in two sections, moved forward. The first section comprised myself and all the mules; the second section was commanded by Professor Smawl, followed by Professor Van Twiller, armed with a tiny shot-gun. William, loaded down with the ladies' toilet articles, skulked in the rear. I say skulked; there was no other word for it.

"So you're a guide, are you?" observed Professor Smawl when William, cap in hand, had approached her with well-meant advice. "The woods are full of lazy guides. Pick up those Gladstone bags! I'll do the guiding for this expedition."

Made cautious by William's humiliation, I associated with the mules exclusively. Nevertheless, Professor Smawl had her hard eyes on me, and I realized she meant mischief.

The encounter took place just as I, driving the five mules, entered the great mountain gateway, thrilled with anticipation which almost amounted to foreboding. As I was about to set foot across the imaginary frontier which divided the world from the unknown land, Professor Smawl hailed me and I halted until she came up.

"As commander of this expedition," she said, somewhat out of breath, "I desire to be the first living creature who has ever set foot behind the Graham Glacier. Kindly step aside, young sir!"

"Madam," said I, rigid with disappointment, "my guide, William Spike, entered that unknown land a year ago."

"He *says* he did," sneered Professor Smawl.

"As you like," I replied; "but it is scarcely generous to forestall the person whose stupidity gave you the clew to this unexplored region."

"You mean yourself?" she asked, with a stony stare.

"I do," said I, firmly.

Her little, hard eyes grew harder, and she clutched her umbrella until the steel ribs crackled.

"Young man," she said, insolently; "if I could have gotten rid of you I should have done so the day I was appointed president. But Professor Farrago refused to resign unless your position was assured, subject, of course, to your good behavior. Frankly, I don't like you, and I consider your views on science ridiculous, and if an opportunity presents itself I will be most happy to request your resignation. Kindly collect your mules and follow me."

Mortified beyond measure, I collected my mules and followed my president into the strange country behind the Hudson Mountains—I who had aspired to lead, compelled to follow in the rear, driving mules.

The journey was monotonous at first, but we shortly ascended a ridge from which we could see, stretching out below us, the wilderness where, save the feet of William Spike, no human feet had passed.

As for me, tingling with enthusiasm, I forgot my chagrin, I forgot the gross injustice, I forgot my mules. "Excelsior!" I cried, running up and down the ridge in uncontrollable excitement at the sublime spectacle of forest, mountain, and valley all set with little lakes.

"Excelsior!" repeated an excited voice at my side, and Professor Van Twiller sprang to the ridge beside me, her eyes bright as stars.

Exalted, inspired by the mysterious beauty of the view, we clasped hands and ran up and down the grassy ridge.

"That will do," said Professor Smawl, coldly, as we raced about like a pair of distracted kittens. The chilling voice broke the spell; I dropped Professor Van Twiller's hand and sat down on a bowlder, aching with wrath.

Late that afternoon we halted beside a tiny lake, deep in the unknown wilderness, where purple and scarlet bergamot choked the shores and the spruce-partridge strutted fearlessly under our very feet. Here we pitched our two tents. The afternoon sun slanted through the pines; the lake glittered; acres of golden brake perfumed

the forest silence, broken only at rare intervals by the distant thunder of a partridge drumming.

Professor Smawl ate heavily and retired to her tent to lie torpid until evening. William drove the unloaded mules into an intervale full of sun-cured, fragrant grasses; I sat down beside Professor Van Twiller.

The wilderness is electric. Once within the influence of its currents, human beings become positively or negatively charged, violently attracting or repelling each other.

"There is something the matter with this air," said Professor Van Twiller. "It makes me feel as though I were desperately enamoured of the entire human race."

She leaned back against a pine, smiling vaguely, and crossing one knee over the other.

Now I am not bold by temperament, and, normally, I fear ladies. Therefore it surprised me to hear myself begin a frivolous *causerie*, replying to her pretty epigrams with epigrams of my own, advancing to the borderland of badinage, fearlessly conducting her and myself over that delicate frontier to meet upon the terrain of undisguised flirtation.

It was clear that she was out for a holiday. The seriousness and restraints of twenty-two years she had left behind her in the civilized world, and now, with a shrug of her young shoulders, she unloosened her burden of reticence, dignity, and responsibility and let the whole load fall with a discreet thud.

"Even hares go mad in March," she said, seriously. "I know you intend to flirt with me—and I don't care. Anyway, there's nothing else to do, is there?"

"Suppose," said I, solemnly, "I should take you behind that big tree and attempt to kiss you!"

The prospect did not appear to appall her, so I looked around with that sneaking yet conciliatory caution peculiar to young men who are novices in the art. Before I had satisfied myself that neither William nor the mules were observing us, Professor Van Twiller rose to her feet and took a short step backward.

"Let's set traps for a dingue," she said, "will you?"

I looked at the big tree, undecided. "Come on," she said; "I'll show you how." And away we went into the woods, she leading, her kilts flashing through the golden half-light.

Now I had not the faintest notion how to trap the dingue, but Professor Van Twiller asserted that it formerly fed on the tender tips of the spruce, quoting Darwin as her authority.

So we gathered a bushel of spruce-tips, piled them on the bank of a little stream, then built a miniature stockade around the bait, a foot high. I roofed this with hemlock, then laboriously whittled out and adjusted a swinging shutter for the entrance, setting it on springy twigs.

"The dingue, you know, was supposed to live in the water," she said, kneeling beside me over our trap.

I took her little hand and thanked her for the information.

"Doubtless," she said, enthusiastically, "a dingue will come out of the lake to-night to feed on our spruce-tips. Then," she added, "we've got him."

"True!" I said, earnestly, and pressed her fingers very gently.

Her face was turned a little away; I don't remember what she said; I don't remember that she said anything. A faint rose-tint stole over her cheek. A few moments later she said: "You must not do that again."

It was quite late when we strolled back to camp. Long before we came in sight of the twin tents we heard a deep voice bawling our names. It was Professor Smawl, and she pounced upon Dorothy and drove her ignominiously into the tent.

"As for you," she said, in hollow tones, "you may explain your conduct at once, or place your resignation at my disposal."

But somehow or other I appeared to be temporarily lost to shame, and I only smiled at my infuriated president, and entered my own tent with a step that was distinctly frolicsome.

"Billy," said I to William Spike, who regarded me morosely from the depths of the tent, "I'm going out to bag a mammoth to-morrow, so kindly clean my elephant-gun and bring an axe to chop out the tusks."

That night Professor Smawl complained bitterly of the cooking, but as neither Dorothy nor I knew how to improve it, she revenged

herself on us by eating everything on the table and retiring to bed, taking Dorothy with her.

I could not sleep very well; the mosquitoes were intrusive, and Professor Smawl dreamed she was a pack of wolves and yelped in her sleep.

"Bird, ain't she?" said William, roused from slumber by her weird noises.

Dorothy, much frightened, crawled out of her tent, where her blanket-mate still dreamed dyspeptically, and William and I made her comfortable by the camp-fire.

It takes a pretty girl to look pretty half asleep in a blanket.

"Are you sure you are quite well?" I asked her.

To make sure, I tested her pulse. For an hour it varied more or less, but without alarming either of us. Then she went back to bed and I sat alone by the camp-fire.

Towards midnight I suddenly began to feel that strange, distant vibration that I had once before felt. As before, the vibration grew on the still air, increasing in volume until it became a sound, then died out into silence.

I rose and stole into my tent.

William, white as death, lay in his corner, weeping in his sleep.

I roused him remorselessly, and he sat up scowling, but refused to tell me what he had been dreaming.

"Was it about that third thing you saw—" I began. But he snarled up at me like a startled animal, and I was obliged to go to bed and toss about and speculate.

The next morning it rained. Dorothy and I visited our dingue-trap but found nothing in it. We were inclined, however, to stay out in the rain behind a big tree, but Professor Smawl vetoed that proposition and sent me off to supply the larder with fresh meat.

I returned, mad and wet, with a dozen partridges and a white hare —brown at that season—and William cooked them vilely.

"I can taste the feathers!" said Professor Smawl, indignantly.

"There is no accounting for taste," I said, with a polite gesture of deprecation; "personally, I find feathers unpalatable."

"You may hand in your resignation this evening!" cried Professor Smawl, in hollow tones of passion.

I passed her the pancakes with a cheerful smile, and flippantly pressed the hand next me. Unexpectedly it proved to be William's sticky fist, and Dorothy and I laughed until her tears ran into Professor Smawl's coffee-cup—an accident which kindled her wrath to red heat, and she requested my resignation five times during the evening.

The next day it rained again, more or less. Professor Smawl complained of the cooking, demanded my resignation, and finally marched out to explore, lugging the reluctant William with her. Dorothy and I sat down behind the largest tree we could find.

I don't remember what we were saying when a peculiar sound interrupted us, and we listened earnestly.

It was like a bell in the woods, ding-dong! ding-dong! ding-dong!—a low, mellow, golden harmony, coming nearer, then stopping.

I clasped Dorothy in my arms in my excitement.

"It is the note of the dingue!" I whispered, "and that explains its name, handed down from remote ages along with the names of the behemoth and the coney. It was because of its bell-like cry that it was named! Darling!" I cried, forgetting our short acquaintance, "we have made a discovery that the whole world will ring with!"

Hand in hand we tiptoed through the forest to our trap. There was something in it that took fright at our approach and rushed panic-stricken round and round the interior of the trap, uttering its alarm-note, which sounded like the jangling of a whole string of bells.

I seized the strangely beautiful creature; it neither attempted to bite nor scratch, but crouched in my arms, trembling and eying me.

Delighted with the lovely, tame animal, we bore it tenderly back to the camp and placed it on my blanket. Hand in hand we stood before it, awed by the sight of this beast, so long believed to be extinct.

"It is too good to be true," sighed Dorothy, clasping her white hands under her chin and gazing at the dingue in rapture.

"Yes," said I, solemnly, "you and I, my child, are face to face with the fabled dingue—*Dingus solitarius*! Let us continue to gaze at it, reverently, prayerfully, humbly—"

Dorothy yawned—probably with excitement.

We were still mutely adoring the dingue when Professor Smawl burst into the tent at a hand-gallop, bawling hoarsely for her kodak

and note-book.

Dorothy seized her triumphantly by the arm and pointed at the dingue, which appeared to be frightened to death.

"What!" cried Professor Smawl, scornfully; "*that* a dingue? Rubbish!"

"Madam," I said, firmly, "it is a dingue! It's a monodactyl! See! It has but a single toe!"

"Bosh!" she retorted; "it's got four!"

"Four!" I repeated, blankly.

"Yes; one on each foot!"

"Of course," I said; "you didn't suppose a monodactyl meant a beast with one leg and one toe!"

But she laughed hatefully and declared it was a woodchuck.

We squabbled for a while until I saw the significance of her attitude. The unfortunate woman wished to find a dingue first and be accredited with the discovery.

I lifted the dingue in both hands and shook the creature gently, until the chiming ding-dong of its protestations filled our ears like sweet bells jangled out of tune.

Pale with rage at this final proof of the dingue's identity, she seized her camera and note-book.

"I haven't any time to waste over that musical woodchuck!" she shouted, and bounced out of the tent.

"What have you discovered, dear?" cried Dorothy, running after her.

"A mammoth!" bawled Professor Smawl, triumphantly; "and I'm going to photograph him!"

Neither Dorothy nor I believed her. We watched the flight of the infatuated woman in silence.

And now, at last, the tragic shadow falls over my paper as I write. I was never passionately attached to Professor Smawl, yet I would gladly refrain from chronicling the episode that must follow if, as I have hitherto attempted, I succeed in sticking to the unornamented truth.

I have said that neither Dorothy nor I believed her. I don't know why, unless it was that we had not yet made up our minds to believe that the mammoth still existed on earth. So, when Professor Smawl

disappeared in the forest, scuttling through the underbrush like a demoralized hen, we viewed her flight with unconcern. There was a large tree in the neighborhood—a pleasant shelter in case of rain. So we sat down behind it, although the sun was shining fiercely.

It was one of those peaceful afternoons in the wilderness when the whole forest dreams, and the shadows are asleep and every little leaflet takes a nap. Under the still tree-tops the dappled sunlight, motionless, soaked the sod; the forest-flies no longer whirled in circles, but sat sunning their wings on slender twig-tips.

The heat was sweet and spicy; the sun drew out the delicate essence of gum and sap, warming volatile juices until they exhaled through the aromatic bark.

The sun went down into the wilderness; the forest stirred in its sleep; a fish splashed in the lake. The spell was broken. Presently the wind began to rise somewhere far away in the unknown land. I heard it coming, nearer, nearer—a brisk wind that grew heavier and blew harder as it neared us—a gale that swept distant branches—a furious gale that set limbs clashing and cracking, nearer and nearer. Crack! and the gale grew to a hurricane, trampling trees like dead twigs! Crack! Crackle! Crash! Crash!

Was it the wind?

With the roaring in my ears I sprang up, staring into the forest vista, and at the same instant, out of the crashing forest, sped Professor Smawl, skirts tucked up, thin legs flying like bicycle-spokes. I shouted, but the crashing drowned my voice. Then all at once the solid earth began to shake, and with the rush and roar of a tornado a gigantic living thing burst out of the forest before our eyes—a vast shadowy bulk that rocked and rolled along, mowing down trees in its course.

Two great crescents of ivory curved from its head; its back swept through the tossing tree-tops. Once it bellowed like a gun fired from a high bastion.

The apparition passed with the noise of thunder rolling on towards the ends of the earth. Crack! crash! went the trees, the tempest swept away in a rolling volley of reports, distant, more distant, until, long after the tumult had deadened, then ceased, the stunned forest echoed with the fall of mangled branches slowly dropping.

That evening an agitated young couple sat close together in the deserted camp, calling timidly at intervals for Professor Smawl and William Spike. I say timidly, because it is correct; we did not care to have a mammoth respond to our calls. The lurking echoes across the lake answered our cries; the full moon came up over the forest to look at us. We were not much to look at. Dorothy was moistening my shoulder with unfeigned tears, and I, afraid to light the fire, sat hunched up under the common blanket, wildly examining the darkness around us.

Chilled to the spinal marrow, I watched the gray lights whiten in the east. A single bird awoke in the wilderness. I saw the nearer trees looming in the mist, and the silver fog rolling on the lake.

All night long the darkness had vibrated with the strange monotone which I had heard the first night, camping at the gate of the unknown land. My brain seemed to echo that subtle harmony which rings in the auricular labyrinth after sound has ceased.

There are ghosts of sound which return to haunt long after sound is dead. It was these voiceless spectres of a voice long dead that stirred the transparent silence, intoning toneless tones.

I think I make myself clear.

It was an uncanny night; morning whitened the east; gray daylight stole into the woods, blotting the shadows to paler tints. It was nearly mid-day before the sun became visible through the fine-spun web of mist—a pale spot of gilt in the zenith.

By this pallid light I labored to strike the two empty tents, gather up our equipments and pack them on our five mules. Dorothy aided me bravely, whimpering when I spoke of Professor Smawl and William Spike, but abating nothing of her industry until we had the mules loaded and I was ready to drive them, Heaven knows whither.

"Where shall we go?" quavered Dorothy, sitting on a log with the dingue in her lap.

One thing was certain; this mammoth-ridden land was no place for women, and I told her so.

We placed the dingue in a basket and tied it around the leading mule's neck. Immediately the dingue, alarmed, began dingling like a cow-bell. It acted like a charm on the other mules, and they gravely

filed off after their leader, following the bell. Dorothy and I, hand in hand, brought up the rear.

I shall never forget that scene in the forest—the gray arch of the heavens swimming in mist through which the sun peered shiftily, the tall pines wavering through the fog, the preoccupied mules marching single file, the foggy bell-note of the gentle dingue in its swinging basket, and Dorothy, limp kilts dripping with dew, plodding through the white dusk.

We followed the terrible tornado-path which the mammoth had left in its wake, but there were no traces of its human victims—neither one jot of Professor Smawl nor one solitary tittle of William Spike.

And now I would be glad to end this chapter if I could; I would gladly leave myself as I was, there in the misty forest, with an arm encircling the slender body of my little companion, and the mules moving in a monotonous line, and the dingue discreetly jingling—but again that menacing shadow falls across my page, and truth bids me tell all, and I, the slave of accuracy, must remember my vows as the dauntless disciple of truth.

Towards sunset—or that pale parody of sunset which set the forest swimming in a ghastly, colorless haze—the mammoth's trail of ruin brought us suddenly out of the trees to the shore of a great sheet of water.

It was a desolate spot; northward a chaos of sombre peaks rose, piled up like thunder-clouds along the horizon; east and south the darkening wilderness spread like a pall. Westward, crawling out into the mist from our very feet, the gray waste of water moved under the dull sky, and flat waves slapped the squatting rocks, heavy with slime.

And now I understood why the trail of the mammoth continued straight into the lake, for on either hand black, filthy tamarack swamps lay under ghostly sheets of mist. I strove to creep out into the bog, seeking a footing, but the swamp quaked and the smooth surface trembled like jelly in a bowl. A stick thrust into the slime sank into unknown depths.

Vaguely alarmed, I gained the firm land again and looked around, believing there was no road open but the desolate trail we had

traversed. But I was in error; already the leading mule was wading out into the water, and the others, one by one, followed.

How wide the lake might be we could not tell, because the band of fog hung across the water like a curtain. Yet out into this flat, shallow void our mules went steadily, slop! slop! slop! in single file. Already they were growing indistinct in the fog, so I bade Dorothy hasten and take off her shoes and stockings.

She was ready before I was, I having to unlace my shooting-boots, and she stepped out into the water, kilts fluttering, moving her white feet cautiously. In a moment I was beside her, and we waded forward, sounding the shallow water with our poles.

When the water had risen to Dorothy's knees I hesitated, alarmed. But when we attempted to retrace our steps we could not find the shore again, for the blank mist shrouded everything, and the water deepened at every step.

I halted and listened for the mules. Far away in the fog I heard a dull splashing, receding as I listened. After a while all sound died away, and a slow horror stole over me—a horror that froze the little net-work of veins in every limb. A step to the right and the water rose to my knees; a step to the left and the cold, thin circle of the flood chilled my breast. Suddenly Dorothy screamed, and the next moment a far cry answered—a far, sweet cry that seemed to come from the sky, like the rushing harmony of the world's swift winds. Then the curtain of fog before us lighted up from behind; shadows moved on the misty screen, outlines of trees and grassy shores, and tiny birds flying. Thrown on the vapory curtain, in silhouette, a man and a woman passed under the lovely trees, arms about each other's necks; near them the shadows of five mules grazed peacefully; a dingue gambolled close by.

"It is a mirage!" I muttered, but my voice made no sound. Slowly the light behind the fog died out; the vapor around us turned to rose, then dissolved, while mile on mile of a limitless sea spread away till, like a quick line pencilled at a stroke, the horizon cut sky and sea in half, and before us lay an ocean from which towered a mountain of snow—or a gigantic berg of milky ice—for it was moving.

"Good Heavens," I shrieked; "it is alive!"

At the sound of my crazed cry the mountain of snow became a pillar, towering to the clouds, and a wave of golden glory drenched the figure to its knees! Figure? Yes—for a colossal arm shot across the sky, then curved back in exquisite grace to a head of awful beauty—a woman's head, with eyes like the blue lake of heaven—ay, a woman's splendid form, upright from the sky to the earth, knee-deep in the sea. The evening clouds drifted across her brow; her shimmering hair lighted the world beneath with sunset. Then, shading her white brow with one hand, she bent, and with the other hand dipped in the sea, she sent a wave rolling at us. Straight out of the horizon it sped—a ripple that grew to a wave, then to a furious breaker which caught us up in a whirl of foam, bearing us onward, faster, faster, swiftly flying through leagues of spray until consciousness ceased and all was blank.

Yet ere my senses fled I heard again that strange cry—that sweet, thrilling harmony rushing out over the foaming waters, filling earth and sky with its soundless vibrations.

And I knew it was the hail of the Spirit of the North warning us back to life again.

Looking back, now, over the days that passed before we staggered into the Hudson Bay outpost at Gravel Cove, I am inclined to believe that neither Dorothy nor I were clothed entirely in our proper minds—or, if we were, our minds, no doubt, must have been in the same condition as our clothing. I remember shooting ptarmigan, and that we ate them; flashes of memory recall the steady downpour of rain through the endless twilight of shaggy forests; dim days on the foggy tundra, mud-holes from which the wild ducks rose in thousands; then the stunted hemlocks, then the forest again. And I do not even recall the moment when, at last, stumbling into the smooth path left by the Graham Glacier, we crawled through the mountain-wall, out of the unknown land, and once more into a world protected by the Lord Almighty.

A hunting-party of Elbon Indians brought us in to the post, and everybody was most kind—that I remember, just before going into several weeks of unpleasant delirium mercifully mitigated with unconsciousness.

Curiously enough, Professor Van Twiller was not very much battered, physically, for I had carried her for days, pickaback. But the awful experience had produced a shock which resulted in a nervous condition that lasted so long after she returned to New York that the wealthy and eminent specialist who attended her insisted upon taking her to the Riviera and marrying her. I sometimes wonder—but, as I have said, such reflections have no place in these austere pages.

However, anybody, I fancy, is at liberty to speculate upon the fate of the late Professor Smawl and William Spike, and upon the mules and the gentle dingue. Personally, I am convinced that the suggestive silhouettes I saw on that ghastly curtain of fog were cast by beatified beings in some earthly paradise—a mirage of bliss of which we caught but the colorless shadow-shapes floating 'twixt sea and sky.

At all events, neither Professor Smawl nor her William Spike ever returned; no exploring expedition has found a trace of mule or lady, of William or the dingue. The new expedition to be organized by Barnard College may penetrate still farther. I suppose that, when the time comes, I shall be expected to volunteer. But Professor Van Twiller is married, and William and Professor Smawl ought to be, and altogether, considering the mammoth and that gigantic and splendid apparition that bent from the zenith to the ocean and sent a tidal-wave rolling from the palm of one white hand—I say, taking all these various matters under consideration, I think I shall decide to remain in New York and continue writing for the scientific periodicals. Besides, the mortifying experience at the Paris Exposition has dampened even my perennially youthful enthusiasm. And as for the late expedition to Florida, Heaven knows I am ready to repeat it—nay, I am already forming a plan for the rescue—but though I am prepared to encounter any danger for the sake of my beloved superior, Professor Farrago, I do not feel inclined to commit indiscretions in order to pry into secrets which, as I regard it, concern Professor Smawl and William Spike alone.

But all this is, in a measure, premature. What I now have to relate is the recital of an eye-witness to that most astonishing scandal which occurred during the recent exposition in Paris.

Chapter 9

When the delegates were appointed to the International Scientific Congress at the Paris Exposition of 1900, how little did anybody imagine that the great conference would end in the most gigantic scandal that ever stirred two continents?

Yet, had it not been for the pair of American newspapers published in Paris, this scandal would never have been aired, for the continental press is so well muzzled that when it bites its teeth merely meet in the empty atmosphere with a discreet snap.

But to the Yankee nothing excepting the Monroe Doctrine is sacred, and the unsopped watch-dogs of the press bite right and left, unmuzzled. The biter bites—it is his profession—and that ends the affair; the bitee is bitten, and, in the deplorable argot of the hour, "it is up to him."

So now that the scandal has been well aired and hung out to dry in the teeth of decency and the four winds, and as all the details have been cheerfully and grossly exaggerated, it is, perhaps, the proper moment for the truth to be written by the only person whose knowledge of all the facts in the affair entitles him to speak for himself as well as for those honorable ladies and gentlemen whose names and titles have been so mercilessly criticised.

These, then, are the simple facts:

The International Scientific Congress, now adjourned *sine die*, met at nine o'clock in the morning, May 3, 1900, in the Tasmanian Pavilion of the Paris Exposition. There were present the most famous scientists of Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Italy, Switzerland, and the United States.

His Royal Highness the Crown-Prince of Monaco presided.

It is not necessary, now, to repeat the details of that preliminary meeting. It is sufficient to say that committees representing the various known sciences were named and appointed by the Prince of Monaco, who had been unanimously elected permanent chairman of the conference. It is the composition of a single committee that concerns us now, and that committee, representing the science which treats of bird life, was made up as follows:

Chairman—His Royal Highness the Crown-Prince of Monaco. Members—Sir Peter Grebe, Great Britain; Baron de Becasse, France; his Royal Highness King Christian, of Finland; the Countess d'Alzette, of Belgium; and I, from the United States, representing the Smithsonian Institution and the Bronx Park Zoological Society of New York.

This, then, was the composition of that now notorious ornithological committee, a modest, earnest, self-effacing little band of workers, bound together—in the beginning—by those ties of mutual respect and esteem which unite all laborers in the vineyard of science.

From the first meeting of our committee, science, the great leveller, left no artificial barriers of rank or title standing between us. We were enthusiasts in our love for ornithology; we found new inspiration in the democracy of our common interests.

As for me, I chatted with my fellows, feeling no restraint myself and perceiving none. The King of Finland and I discussed his latest monograph on the speckled titmouse, and I was glad to agree with the King in all his theories concerning the nesting habits of that important bird.

Sir Peter Grebe, a large, red gentleman in tweeds, read us some notes he had made on the domestic hen and her reasons for running ahead of a horse and wagon instead of stepping aside to let the disturbing vehicle pass.

The Crown-Prince of Monaco took issue with Sir Peter; so did the Baron de Becasse; and we were entertained by a friendly and marvellously interesting three-cornered dispute, shared in by three of the most profound thinkers of the century.

I shall never forget the brilliancy of that argument, nor the modest, good-humored retorts which gave us all a glimpse into depths of erudition which impressed us profoundly and set the seal on the bonds which held us so closely together.

Alas, that the seal should ever have been broken! Alas, that the glittering apple of discord should have been flung into our midst!—no, not flung, but gently rolled under our noses by the gloved fingers of the lovely Countess d'Alzette.

"Messieurs," said the fair Countess, when all present, excepting she and I, had touched upon or indicated the subjects which they had prepared to present to the congress—"messieurs mes confrères, I have been requested by our distinguished chairman, the Crown-Prince of Monaco, to submit to your judgment the subject which, by favor of the King of the Belgians, I have prepared to present to the International Scientific Congress."

She made a pretty courtesy as she named her own sovereign, and we all rose out of respect to that most austere and moral ruler the King of Belgium.

"But," she said, with a charming smile of depreciation, "I am very, very much afraid that the subject which I have chosen may not meet with your approval, gentlemen."

She stood there in her dainty Parisian gown and bonnet, shaking her pretty head uncertainly, a smile on her lips, her small, gloved fingers interlocked.

"Oh, I know how dreadful it would be if this great congress should be compelled to listen to any hoax like that which Monsieur de Rougemont imposed on the British Royal Society," she said, gravely; "and because the subject of my paper is as strange as the strangest phenomenon alleged to have been noted by Monsieur de Rougemont, I hesitate—"

She glanced at the silent listeners around her. Sir Peter's red face had hardened; the King of Finland frowned slightly; the Crown-Prince of Monaco and Baron de Becasse wore anxious smiles. But when her violet eyes met mine I gave her a glance of encouragement, and that glance, I am forced to confess, was not dictated by scientific approval, but by something that never entirely dries up in the mustiest and dustiest of savants—the old Adam implanted in us all.

Now, I knew perfectly well what her subject must be; so did every man present. For it was no secret that his Majesty of Belgium had been swindled by some natives in Tasmania, and had paid a very large sum of money for a skin of that gigantic bird, the ux, which has been so often reported to exist among the inaccessible peaks of the Tasmanian Mountains. Needless, perhaps, to say that the skin proved a fraud, being nothing more than a Barnum contrivance made up out of the skins of a dozen ostriches and cassowaries, and most cleverly put together by Chinese workmen; at least, such was the report made on it by Sir Peter Grebe, who had been sent by the British Society to Antwerp to examine the acquisition. Needless, also, perhaps, to say that King Leopold, of Belgium, stoutly maintained that the skin of the ux was genuine from beak to claw.

For six months there had been a most serious difference of opinion among European ornithologists concerning the famous ux in the Antwerp Museum; and this difference had promised to result in an open quarrel between a few Belgian savants on one side and-all Europe and Great Britain on the other.

Scientists have a deep—rooted horror of anything that touches on charlatanism; the taint of trickery not only alarms them, but drives them away from any suspicious subject, and usually ruins, scientifically speaking, the person who has introduced the subject for discussion.

Therefore, it took no little courage for the Countess d'Alzette to touch, with her dainty gloves, a subject which every scientist in Europe, with scarcely an exception, had pronounced fraudulent and unworthy of investigation. And to bring it before the great International Congress required more courage still; for the person who could face, in executive session, the most brilliant intellects in the world, and openly profess faith in a Barnumized bird skin, either had no scientific reputation to lose or was possessed of a bravery far above that of the savants who composed the audience.

Now, when the pretty Countess caught a flash of encouragement in my glance she turned rosy with gratification and surprise. Clearly, she had not expected to find a single ally in the entire congress. Her quick smile of gratitude touched me, and made me ashamed, too, for I had encouraged her out of the pure love of mischief, hoping to hear

the whole matter threshed before the congress and so have it settled once for all. It was a thoughtless thing to do on my part. I should have remembered the consequences to the Countess if it were proven that she had been championing a fraud. The ruffled dignity of the congress would never forgive her; her scientific career would practically be at an end, because her theories and observations could no longer command respect or even the attention of those who knew that she herself had once been deceived by a palpable fraud.

I looked at her guiltily, already ashamed of myself for encouraging her to her destruction. How lovely and innocent she appeared, standing there reading her notes in a low, clear voice, fresh as a child's, with now and then a delicious upward sweep of her long, dark lashes.

With a start I came to my senses and bestowed a pinch on myself. This was neither the time nor the place to sentimentalize over a girlish beauty whose small, Parisian head was crammed full of foolish, brave theories concerning an imposition which her aged sovereign had been unable to detect.

I saw the gathering frown on the King of Finland's dark face; I saw Sir Peter Grebe grow redder and redder, and press his thick lips together to control the angry "Bosh!" which need not have been uttered to have been understood. The Baron de Becasse wore a painfully neutral smile, which froze his face into a quaint gargoyle; the Crown-Prince of Monaco looked at his polished fingernails with a startled yet abstracted resignation. Clearly the young Countess had not a sympathizer in the committee.

Something—perhaps it was the latent chivalry which exists imbedded in us all, perhaps it was pity, perhaps a glimmering dawn of belief in the ux skin—set my thoughts working very quickly.

The Countess d'Alzette finished her notes, then glanced around with a deprecating smile, which died out on her lips when she perceived the silent and stony hostility of her fellow-scientists. A quick expression of alarm came into her lovely eyes. Would they vote against giving her a hearing before the congress? It required a unanimous vote to reject a subject. She turned her eyes on me.

I rose, red as fire, my head humming with a chaos of ideas all disordered and vague, yet whirling along in a single, resistless

current. I had come to the congress prepared to deliver a monograph on the great auk; but now the subject went overboard as the birds themselves had, and I found myself pleading with the committee to give the Countess a hearing on the ux.

"Why not?" I exclaimed, warmly. "It is established beyond question that the ux does exist in Tasmania. Wallace saw several uxen, through his telescope, walking about upon the inaccessible heights of the Tasmanian Mountains. Darwin acknowledged that the bird exists; Professor Farrago has published a pamphlet containing an accumulation of all data bearing upon the ux. Why should not Madame la Comtesse be heard by the entire congress?"

I looked at Sir Peter Grebe.

"Have *you* seen this alleged bird skin in the Antwerp Museum?" he asked, perspiring with indignation.

"Yes, I have," said I. "It has been patched up, but how are we to know that the skin did not require patching? I have not found that ostrich skin has been used. It is true that the Tasmanians may have shot the bird to pieces and mended the skin with bits of cassowary hide here and there. But the greater part of the skin, and the beak and claws, are, in my estimation, well worth the serious attention of savants. To pronounce them fraudulent is, in my opinion, rash and premature."

I mopped my brow; I was in for it now. I had thrown in my reputation with the reputation of the Countess.

The displeasure and astonishment of my confrères was unmistakable. In the midst of a strained silence I moved that a vote be taken upon the advisability of a hearing before the congress on the subject of the ux. After a pause the young Countess, pale and determined, seconded my motion. The result of the balloting was a foregone conclusion; the Countess had one vote—she herself refraining from voting—and the subject was entered on the committee-book as acceptable and a date set for the hearing before the International Congress.

The effect of this vote on our little committee was most marked. Constraint took the place of cordiality, polite reserve replaced that guileless and open-hearted courtesy with which our proceedings had begun.

With icy politeness, the Crown-Prince of Monaco asked me to state the subject of the paper I proposed to read before the congress, and I replied quietly that, as I was partly responsible for advocating the discussion of the ux, I proposed to associate myself with the Countess d'Alzette in that matter—if Madame la Comtesse would accept the offer of a brother savant.

"Indeed I will," she said, impulsively, her blue eyes soft with gratitude.

"Very well," observed Sir Peter Grebe, swallowing his indignation and waddling off towards the door; "I shall resign my position on this committee—yes, I will, I tell you!"—as the King of Finland laid a fatherly hand on Sir Peter's sleeve—"I'll not be made responsible for this damn—"

He choked, sputtered, then bowed to the horrified Countess, asking pardon, and declaring that he yielded to nobody in respect for the gentler sex. And he retired with the Baron de Becasse.

But out in the hallway I heard him explode. "Confound it! This is no place for petticoats, Baron! And as for that Yankee ornithologist, he's hung himself with the Countess's corset—string—yes, he has! Don't tell me, Baron! The young idiot was all right until the Countess looked at him, I tell you. Gad! how she crumpled him up with those blue eyes of hers! What the devil do women come into such committees for? Eh? It's an outrage, I tell you! Why, the whole world will jeer at us if we sit and listen to her monograph on that fraudulent bird!"

The young Countess, who was writing near the window, could not have heard this outburst; but I heard it, and so did King Christian and the Crown-Prince of Monaco.

"Lord," thought I, "the Countess and I are in the frying-pan this time. I'll do what I can to keep us both out of the fire."

When the King and the Crown-Prince had made their adieux to the Countess, and she had responded, pale and serious, they came over to where I was standing, looking out on the Seine.

"Though we must differ from you," said the King, kindly, "we wish you all success in this dangerous undertaking."

I thanked him.

"You are a young man to risk a reputation already established," remarked the Crown-Prince, then added: "You are braver than I. Ridicule is a barrier to all knowledge, and, though we know that, we seekers after truth always bring up short at that barrier and dismount, not daring to put our hobbies to the fence."

"One can but come a cropper," said I.

"And risk staking our hobbies? No, no, that would make us ridiculous; and ridicule kills in Europe."

"It's somewhat deadly in America, too," I said, smiling.

"The more honor to you," said the Crown-Prince, gravely.

"Oh, I am not the only one," I answered, lightly. "There is my confrère, Professor Hyssop, who studies apparitions and braves a contempt and ridicule which none of us would dare challenge. We Yankees are learning slowly. Some day we will find the lost key to the future while Europe is sneering at those who are trying to pick the lock."

When King Christian, of Finland, and the Crown-Prince of Monaco had taken their hats and sticks and departed, I glanced across the room at the young Countess, who was now working rapidly on a type-writer, apparently quite oblivious of my presence.

I looked out of the window again, and my gaze wandered over the exposition grounds. Gilt and scarlet and azure the palaces rose in every direction, under a wilderness of fluttering flags. Towers, minarets, turrets, golden spires cut the blue sky; in the west the gaunt Eiffel Tower sprawled across the glittering Esplanade; behind it rose the solid golden dome of the Emperor's tomb, gilded once more by the Almighty's sun, to amuse the living rabble while the dead slumbered in his imperial crypt, himself now but a relic for the amusement of the people whom he had despised. O tempora! O mores! O Napoleon!

Down under my window, in the asphalted court, the King of Finland was entering his beautiful victoria. An adjutant, wearing a cocked hat and brilliant uniform, mounted the box beside the green-and-gold coachman; the two postilions straightened up in their saddles; the four horses danced. Then, when the Crown-Prince of Monaco had taken a seat beside the King, the carriage rolled away, and far down the quay I watched it until the flutter of the green-and-

white plumes in the adjutant's cocked hat was all I could see of vanishing royalty.

I was still musing there by the window, listening to the click and ringing of the type-writer, when I suddenly became aware that the clicking had ceased, and, turning, I saw the young Countess standing beside me.

"Thank you for your chivalrous impulse to help me," she said, frankly, holding out her bare hand.

I bent over it.

"I had not realized how desperate my case was," she said, with a smile. "I supposed that they would at least give me a hearing. How can I thank you for your brave vote in my favor?"

"By giving me your confidence in this matter," said I, gravely. "If we are to win, we must work together and work hard, madame. We are entering a struggle, not only to prove the genuineness of a bird skin and the existence of a bird which neither of us has ever seen, but also a struggle which will either make us famous forever or render it impossible for either of us ever again to face a scientific audience."

"I know it," she said, quietly "And I understand all the better how gallant a gentleman I have had the fortune to enlist in my cause. Believe me, had I not absolute confidence in my ability to prove the existence of the ux I should not, selfish as I am, have accepted your chivalrous offer to stand or fall with me."

The subtle emotion in her voice touched a responsive chord in me. I looked at her earnestly; she raised her beautiful eyes to mine.

"Will you help me?" she asked.

Would I help her? Faith, I'd pass the balance of my life turning flip-flaps to please her. I did not attempt to undeceive myself; I realized that the lightning had struck me—that I was desperately in love with the young Countess from the tip of her bonnet to the toe of her small, polished shoe. I was curiously cool about it, too, although my heart gave a thump that nigh choked me, and I felt myself going red from temple to chin.

If the Countess d'Alzette noticed it she gave no sign, unless the pink tint under her eyes, deepening, was a subtle signal of understanding to the signal in my eyes.

"Suppose," she said, "that I failed, before the congress, to prove my theory? Suppose my investigations resulted in the exposure of a fraud and my name was held up to ridicule before all Europe? What would become of you, monsieur?"

I was silent.

"You are already celebrated as the discoverer of the mammoth and the great auk," she persisted. "You are young, enthusiastic, renowned, and you have a future before you that anybody in the world might envy."

I said nothing.

"And yet," she said, softly, "you risk all because you will not leave a young woman friendless among her confrères. It is not wise, monsieur; it is gallant and generous and impulsive, but it is not wisdom. Don Quixote rides no more in Europe, my friend."

"He stays at home—seventy million of him—in America," said I.

After a moment she said, "I believe you, monsieur."

"It is true enough," I said, with a laugh. "We are the only people who tilt at windmills these days—we and our cousins, the British, who taught us."

I bowed gayly, and added:

"With your colors to wear, I shall have the honor of breaking a lance against the biggest windmill in the world."

"You mean the Citadel of Science," she said, smiling.

"And its rock-ribbed respectability," I replied.

She looked at me thoughtfully, rolling and unrolling the scroll in her hands. Then she sighed, smiled, and brightened, handing me the scroll.

"Read it carefully," she said; "it is an outline of the policy I suggest that we follow. You will be surprised at some of the statements. Yet every word is the truth. And, monsieur, your reward for the devotion you have offered will be no greater than you deserve, when you find yourself doubly famous for our joint monograph on the ux. Without your vote in the committee I should have been denied a hearing, even though I produced proofs to support my theory. I appreciate that; I do most truly appreciate the courage which prompted you to defend a woman at the risk of your own ruin. Come to me this

evening at nine. I hold for you in store a surprise and pleasure which you do not dream of."

"Ah, but I do," I said, slowly, under the spell of her delicate beauty and enthusiasm.

"How can you?" she said, laughing. "You don't know what awaits you at nine this evening?"

"You," I said, fascinated.

The color swept her face; she dropped me a deep courtesy.

"At nine, then," she said. "No. 8 Rue d'Alouette."

I bowed, took my hat, gloves, and stick, and attended her to her carriage below.

Long after the blue-and-black victoria had whirled away down the crowded quay I stood looking after it, mazed in the web of that ancient enchantment whose spell fell over the first man in Eden, and whose sorcery shall not fail till the last man returns his soul.

Chapter 10

I lunched at my lodgings on the Quai Malthus, and I had but little appetite, having fed upon such an unexpected variety of emotions during the morning.

Now, although I was already heels over head in love, I do not believe that loss of appetite was the result of that alone. I was slowly beginning to realize what my recent attitude might cost me, not only in an utter collapse of my scientific career, and the consequent material ruin which was likely to follow, but in the loss of all my friends at home. The Zoological Society of Bronx Park and the Smithsonian Institution of Washington had sent me as their trusted delegate, leaving it entirely to me to choose the subject on which I was to speak before the International Congress. What, then, would be their attitude when they learned that I had chosen to uphold the dangerous theory of the existence of the ux.

Would they repudiate me and send another delegate to replace me? Would they merely wash their hands of me and let me go to my own destruction?

"I will know soon enough," thought I, "for this morning's proceedings will have been cabled to New York ere now, and read at the breakfast-tables of every old, moss-grown naturalist in America before I see the Countess d'Alzette this evening." And I drew from my pocket the roll of paper which she had given me, and, lighting a cigar, lay back in my chair to read it.

The manuscript had been beautifully type-written, and I had no trouble in following her brief, clear account of the circumstances under which the notorious ux-skin had been obtained. As for the

story itself, it was somewhat fishy, but I manfully swallowed my growing nervousness and comforted myself with the belief of Darwin in the existence of the ux, and the subsequent testimony of Wallace, who simply stated what he had seen through his telescope, and then left it to others to identify the enormous birds he described as he had observed them stalking about on the snowy peaks of the Tasmanian Alps.

My own knowledge of the ux was confined to a single circumstance. When, in 1897, I had gone to Tasmania with Professor Farrago, to make a report on the availability of the so-called "Tasmanian devil," as a substitute for the mongoose in the West Indies, I of course heard a great deal of talk among the natives concerning the birds which they affirmed haunted the summits of the mountains.

Our time in Tasmania was too limited to admit of an exploration then. But although we were perfectly aware that the summits of the Tasmanian Alps are inaccessible, we certainly should have attempted to gain them had not the time set for our departure arrived before we had completed the investigation for which we were sent.

One relic, however, I carried away with me. It was a single greenish bronzed feather, found high up in the mountains by a native, and sold to me for a somewhat large sum of money.

Darwin believed the ux to be covered with greenish plumage; Wallace was too far away to observe the color of the great birds; but all the natives of Tasmania unite in affirming that the plumage of the ux is green.

It was not only the color of this feather that made me an eager purchaser, it was the extraordinary length and size. I knew of no living bird large enough to wear such a feather. As for the color, that might have been tampered with before I bought it, and, indeed, testing it later, I found on the fronds traces of sulphate of copper. But the same thing has been found in the feathers of certain birds whose color is metallic green, and it has been proven that such birds pick up and swallow shining bits of copper pyrites.

Why should not the ux do the same thing?

Still, my only reason for believing in the existence of the bird was this single feather. I had easily proved that it belonged to no known

species of bird. I also proved it to be similar to the tail-feathers of the ux-skin in Antwerp. But the feathers on the Antwerp specimen were gray, and the longest of them was but three feet in length, while my huge, bronze-green feather measured eleven feet from tip to tip.

One might account for it supposing the Antwerp skin to be that of a young bird, or of a moulting bird, or perhaps of a different sex from the bird whose feather I had secured.

Still, these ideas were not proven. Nothing concerning the birds had been proven. I had but a single fact to lean on, and that was that the feather I possessed could not have belonged to any known species of bird. Nobody but myself knew of the existence of this feather. And now I meant to cable to Bronx Park for it, and to place this evidence at the disposal of the beautiful Countess d'Alzette.

My cigar had gone out, as I sat musing, and I relighted it and resumed my reading of the type-written notes, lazily, even a trifle sceptically, for all the evidence that she had been able to collect to substantiate her theory of the existence of the ux was not half as important as the evidence I was to produce in the shape of that enormous green feather.

I came to the last paragraph, smoking serenely, and leaning back comfortably, one leg crossed over the other. Then, suddenly, my attention became riveted on the words under my eyes. Could I have read them aright? Could I believe what I read in ever-growing astonishment which culminated in an excitement that stirred the very hair on my head?

"The ux exists. There is no longer room for doubt. Ocular proof I can now offer in the shape of *five living eggs* of this gigantic bird. All measures have been taken to hatch these eggs; they are now in the vast incubator. It is my plan to have them hatch, one by one, under the very eyes of the International Congress. It will be the greatest triumph that science has witnessed since the discovery of the New World.

[Signed] "SUSANNE D'ALZETTE."

"Either," I cried out, in uncontrollable excitement—"either that girl is mad or she is the cleverest woman on earth."

After a moment I added:

"In either event I am going to marry her."

Chapter 11

That evening, a few minutes before nine o'clock, I descended from a cab in front of No. 8 Rue d'Alouette, and was ushered into a pretty reception-room by an irreproachable servant, who disappeared directly with my card.

In a few moments the young Countess came in, exquisite in her silvery dinner-gown, eyes bright, white arms extended in a charming, impulsive welcome. The touch of her silky fingers thrilled me; I was dumb under the enchantment of her beauty; and I think she understood my silence, for her blue eyes became troubled and the happy parting of her lips changed to a pensive curve.

Presently I began to tell her about my bronzed-green feather; at my first word she looked up brightly, almost gratefully, I fancied; and in another moment we were deep in eager discussion of the subject which had first drawn us together.

What evidence I possessed to sustain our theory concerning the existence of the ux I hastened to reveal; then, heart beating excitedly, I asked her about the eggs and where they were at present, and whether she believed it possible to bring them to Paris —all these questions in the same breath—which brought a happy light into her eyes and a delicious ripple of laughter to her lips.

"Why, of course it is possible to bring the eggs here," she cried. "Am I sure? Parbleu! The eggs are already here, monsieur!"

"Here!" I exclaimed. "In Paris?"

"In Paris? Mais oui; and in my own house—*this very house*, monsieur. Come, you shall behold them with your own eyes!"

Her eyes were brilliant with excitement; impulsively she stretched out her rosy hand. I took it; and she led me quickly back through the drawing-room, through the dining-room, across the butler's pantry, and into a long, dark hallway. We were almost running now—I keeping tight hold of her soft little hand, she, raising her gown a trifle, hurrying down the hallway, silken petticoats rustling like a silk banner in the wind. A turn to the right brought us to the cellar-stairs; down we hastened, and then across the cemented floor towards a long, glass-fronted shelf, pierced with steam-pipes.

"A match," she whispered, breathlessly.

I struck a wax match and touched it to the gas-burner overhead.

Never, never can I forget what that flood of gas-light revealed. In a row stood five large, glass-mounted incubators; behind the glass doors lay, in dormant majesty, five enormous eggs. The eggs were pale-green—lighter, somewhat, than robins' eggs, but not as pale as herons' eggs. Each egg appeared to be larger than a large hogs-head, and was partly embedded in bales of cotton-wool.

Five little silver thermometers inside the glass doors indicated a temperature of 95° Fahrenheit. I noticed that there was an automatic arrangement connected with the pipes which regulated the temperature.

I was too deeply moved for words. Speech seemed superfluous as we stood there, hand in hand, contemplating those gigantic, pale-green eggs.

There is something in a silent egg which moves one's deeper emotions—something solemn in its embryotic inertia, something awesome in its featureless immobility.

I know of nothing on earth which is so totally lacking in expression as an egg. The great desert Sphinx, brooding through its veil of sand, has not that tremendous and meaningless dignity which wraps the colorless oval effort of a single domestic hen.

I held the hand of the young Countess very tightly. Her fingers closed slightly.

Then and there, in the solemn presence of those emotionless eggs, I placed my arm around her supple waist and kissed her.

She said nothing. Presently she stooped to observe the thermometer. Naturally, it registered 95° Fahrenheit.

"Susanne," I said, softly.

"Oh, we must go up-stairs," she whispered, breathlessly; and, picking up her silken skirts, she fled up the cellar-stairs.

I turned out the gas, with that instinct of economy which early wastefulness has implanted in me, and followed the Countess Suzanne through the suite of rooms and into the small reception-hall where she had first received me.

She was sitting on a low divan, head bent, slowly turning a sapphire ring on her finger, round and round.

I looked at her romantically, and then—

"Please don't," she said.

The correct reply to this is:

"Why not?"—very tenderly spoken.

"Because," she replied, which was also the correct and regular answer.

"Suzanne," I said, slowly and passionately.

She turned the sapphire ring on her finger. Presently she tired of this, so I lifted her passive hand very gently and continued turning the sapphire ring on her finger, slowly, to harmonize with the cadence of our unspoken thoughts.

Towards midnight I went home, walking with great care through a new street in Paris, paved exclusively with rose-colored blocks of air.

Chapter 12

At nine o'clock in the evening, July 31, 1900, the International Congress was to assemble in the great lecture-hall of the Belgian Scientific Pavilion, which adjourned the Tasmanian Pavilion, to hear the Countess Suzanne d'Alzette read her paper on the ux.

That morning the Countess and I, with five furniture vans, had transported the five great incubators to the platform of the lecture-hall, and had engaged an army of plumbers and gas-fitters to make the steam-heating connections necessary to maintain in the incubators a temperature of 100° Fahrenheit.

A heavy green curtain hid the stage from the body of the lecture-hall. Behind this curtain the five enormous eggs reposed, each in its incubator.

The Countess Suzanne was excited and calm by turns, her cheeks were pink, her lips scarlet, her eyes bright as blue planets at midnight.

Without faltering she rehearsed her discourse before me, reading from her type-written manuscript in a clear voice, in which I could scarcely discern a tremor. Then we went through the dumb show of exhibiting the uxen eggs to a frantically applauding audience; she responded to countless supposititious encores, I leading her out repeatedly before the green curtain to face the great, damp, darkened auditorium.

Then, in response to repeated imaginary recalls, she rehearsed the extemporaneous speech, thanking the distinguished audience for their patience in listening to an unknown confrère, and confessing her obligations to me (here I appeared and bowed in self-

abasement) for my faith in her and my aid in securing for her a public hearing before the most highly educated audience in the world.

After that we retired behind the curtain to sit on an empty box and eat sandwiches and watch the last lingering plumbers pasting up the steam connections with a pot of molten lead.

The plumbers were Americans, brought to Paris to make repairs on the American buildings during the exposition, and we conversed with them affably as they pottered about, plumber-like, poking under the flooring with lighted candles, rubbing their thumbs up and down musty old pipes, and prying up planks in dark corners.

They informed us that they were union men and that they hoped we were too. And I replied that union was certainly my ultimate purpose, at which the young Countess smiled dreamily at vacancy.

We did not dare leave the incubators. The plumbers lingered on, hour after hour, while we sat and watched the little silver thermometers, and waited.

It was time for the Countess Suzanne to dress, and still the plumbers had not finished; so I sent a messenger for her maid, to bring her trunk to the lecture-hall, and I despatched another messenger to my lodgings for my evening clothes and fresh linen.

There were several dressing-rooms off the stage. Here, about six o'clock, the Countess retired with her maid, to dress, leaving me to watch the plumbers and the thermometers.

When the Countess Suzanne returned, radiant and lovely in an evening gown of black lace, I gave her the roses I had brought for her and hurried off to dress in my turn, leaving her to watch the thermometers.

I was not absent more than half an hour, but when I returned I found the Countess anxiously conversing with the plumbers and pointing despairingly at the thermometers, which now registered only 95°.

"You must keep up the temperature!" I said. "Those eggs are due to hatch within a few hours. What's the trouble with the heat?"

The plumber did not know, but thought the connections were defective.

"But that's why we called you in!" exclaimed the Countess. "Can't you fix things securely?"

"Oh, we'll fix things, lady," replied the plumber, condescendingly, and he ambled away to rub his thumb up and down a pipe.

As we alone were unable to move and handle the enormous eggs, the Countess, whose sweet character was a stranger to vindictiveness or petty resentment, had written to the members of the ornithological committee, revealing the marvellous fortune which had crowned her efforts in the search for evidence to sustain her theory concerning the ux, and inviting these gentlemen to aid her in displaying the great eggs to the assembled congress.

This she had done the night previous. Every one of the gentlemen invited had come post-haste to her "hotel," to view the eggs with their own sceptical and astonished eyes; and the fair young Countess and I tasted our first triumph in her cellar, whither we conducted Sir Peter Grebe, the Crown-Prince of Monaco, Baron de Becasse, and his Majesty King Christian of Finland.

Scepticism and incredulity gave place to excitement and unbounded enthusiasm. The old King embraced the Countess; Baron de Becasse attempted to kiss me; Sir Peter Grebe made a handsome apology for his folly and vowed that he would do open penance for his sins. The poor Crown-Prince, who was of a nervous temperament, sat on the cellar-stairs and wept like a child.

His grief at his own pig-headedness touched us all profoundly.

So it happened that these gentlemen were coming to-night to give their aid to us in moving the priceless eggs, and lend their countenance and enthusiastic support to the young Countess in her maiden effort.

Sir Peter Grebe arrived first, all covered with orders and decorations, and greeted us affectionately, calling the Countess the "sweetest lass in France," and me his undutiful Yankee cousin who had landed feet foremost at the expense of the British Empire.

The King of Finland, the Crown-Prince, and Baron de Becasse arrived together, a composite mass of medals, sashes, and academy palms. To see them moving boxes about, straightening chairs, and pulling out rugs reminded me of those golden-embroidered gentlemen who run out into the arena and roll up carpets after the acrobats have finished their turn in the Nouveau Cirque.

I was aiding the King of Finland to move a heavy keg of nails, when the Countess called out to me in alarm, saying that the thermometers had dropped to 80° Fahrenheit.

I spoke sharply to the plumbers, who were standing in a circle behind the dressing-rooms; but they answered sullenly that they could do no more work that day.

Indignant and alarmed, I ordered them to come out to the stage, and, after some hesitation, they filed out, a sulky, silent lot of workmen, with their tools already gathered up and tied in their kits. At once I noticed that a new man had appeared among them—a red-faced, stocky man wearing a frock-coat and a shiny silk hat.

"Who is the master-workman here?" I asked.

"I am," said a man in blue overalls.

"Well," said I, "why don't you fix those steam-fittings?"

There was a silence. The man in the silk hat smirked.

"Well?" said I.

"Come, come, that's all right," said the man in the silk hat. "These men know their business without you tellin' them."

"Who are you?" I demanded, sharply.

"Oh, I'm just a walkin' delegate," he replied, with a sneer. "There's a strike in New York and I come over here to tie this here exposition up. See?"

"You mean to say you won't let these men finish their work?" I asked, thunderstruck.

"That's about it, young man," he said, coolly.

Furious, I glanced at my watch, then at the thermometers, which now registered only 75°. Already I could hear the first-comers of the audience arriving in the body of the hall. Already a stage-hand was turning up the footlights and dragging chairs and tables hither and thither.

"What will you take to stay and attend to those steam-pipes?" I demanded, desperately.

"It can't be done nohow," observed the man in the silk hat. "That New York strike is good for a month yet." Then, turning to the workmen, he nodded and, to my horror, the whole gang filed out after him, turning deaf ears to my entreaties and threats.

There was a deathly silence, then Sir Peter exploded into a vivid shower of words. The Countess, pale as a ghost, gave me a heart-breaking look. The Crown-Prince wept.

"Great Heaven!" I cried; "the thermometers have fallen to 70°!"

The King of Finland sat down on a chair and pressed his hands over his eyes. Baron de Becasse ran round and round, uttering subdued and plaintive screams; Sir Peter swore steadily.

"Gentlemen," I cried, desperately, "we must save those eggs! They are on the very eve of hatching! Who will volunteer?"

"To do what?" moaned the Crown-Prince.

"I'll show you," I exclaimed, running to the incubators and beckoning to the Baron to aid me.

In a moment we had rolled out the great egg, made a nest on the stage floor with the bales of cotton-wool, and placed the egg in it. One after another we rolled out the remaining eggs, building for each its nest of cotton; and at last the five enormous eggs lay there in a row behind the green curtain.

"Now," said I, excitedly, to the King, "you must get up on that egg and try to keep it warm."

The King began to protest, but I would take no denial, and presently his Majesty was perched up on the great egg, gazing foolishly about at the others, who were now all climbing up on their allotted eggs.

"Great Heaven!" muttered the King, as Sir Peter settled down comfortably on his egg, "I am willing to give life and fortune for the sake of science, but I can't bear to hatch out eggs like a bird!"

The Crown-Prince was now sitting patiently beside the Baron de Becasse.

"I feel in my bones," he murmured, "that I'm about to hatch something. Can't you hear a tapping on the shell of your egg, Baron?"

"Parbleu!" replied the Baron. "The shell is moving under me."

It certainly was; for, the next moment, the Baron fell into his egg with a crash and a muffled shriek, and floundered out, dripping, yellow as a canary.

"N'importe!" he cried, excitedly. "Allons! Save the eggs! Hurrah! Vive la science!" And he scrambled up on the fourth egg and sat

there, arms folded, sublime courage transfiguring him from head to foot.

We all gave him a cheer, which was hushed as the stage-manager ran in, warning us that the audience was already assembled and in place.

"You're not going to raise the curtain while we're sitting, are you?" demanded the King of Finland, anxiously.

"No, no," I said; "sit tight, your Majesty. Courage, gentlemen! Our vindication is at hand!"

The Countess glanced at me with startled eyes; I took her hand, saluted it respectfully, and then quietly led her before the curtain, facing an ocean of upturned faces across the flaring footlights.

She stood a moment to acknowledge the somewhat ragged applause, a calm smile on her lips. All her courage had returned; I saw that at once.

Very quietly she touched her lips to the *eau-sucrée*, laid her manuscript on the table, raised her beautiful head, and began:

"That the ux is a living bird I am here before you to prove—"

A sharp report behind the curtain drowned her voice. She paled; the audience rose amid cries of excitement.

"What was it?" she asked, faintly.

"Sir Peter has hatched out his egg," I whispered. "Hark! There goes another egg!" And I ran behind the curtain.

Such a scene as I beheld was never dreamed of on land or sea. Two enormous young uxen, all over gigantic pin-feathers, were wandering stupidly about. Mounted on one was Sir Peter Grebe, eyes starting from his apoplectic visage; on the other, clinging to the bird's neck, hung the Baron de Becasse.

Before I could move, the two remaining eggs burst, and a pair of huge, scrawny fledglings rose among the débris, bearing off on their backs the King and Crown-Prince.

"Help!" said the King of Finland, faintly. "I'm falling off!"

I sprang to his aid, but tripped on the curtain-spring. The next instant the green curtain shot up, and there, revealed to that vast and distinguished audience, roamed four enormous chicks, bearing on their backs the most respected and exclusive aristocracy of Europe.

The Countess Suzanne turned with a little shriek of horror, then sat down in her chair, laid her lovely head on the table, and very quietly fainted away, unconscious of the frantic cheers which went roaring to the roof.

This, then, is the *true* history of the famous exposition scandal. And, as I have said, had it not been for the presence in that audience of two American reporters nobody would have known what all the world now knows—nobody would have read of the marvellous feats of bareback riding indulged in by the King of Finland—nobody would have read how Sir Peter Grebe steered his mount safely past the footlights only to come to grief over the prompter's box.

But this *is* scandal. And, as for the charming Countess Suzanne d'Alzette, the public has heard all that it is entitled to hear, and much that it is not entitled to hear.

However, on second thoughts, perhaps the public is entitled to hear a little more. I will therefore say this much—the shock of astonishment which stunned me when the curtain flew up, revealing the King-bestridden uxen, was nothing to the awful blow which smote me when the Count d'Alzette leaped from the orchestra, over the footlights, and bore away with him the fainting form of his wife, the lovely Countess d'Alzette.

I sometimes wonder—but, as I have repeatedly observed, this dull and pedantic narrative of fact is no vehicle for sentimental soliloquy. It is, then, merely sufficient to say that I took the earliest steamer for kinder shores, spurred on to haste by a venomous cable-gram from the Smithsonian, repudiating me, and by another from Bronx Park, ordering me to spend the winter in some inexpensive, poisonous, and unobtrusive spot, and make a collection of isopods. The island of Java appeared to me to be as poisonously unobtrusive and inexpensive a region as I had ever heard of; a steamer sailed from Antwerp for Batavia in twenty-four hours. Therefore, as I say, I took the night-train for Brussels, and the steamer from Antwerp the following evening.

Of my uneventful voyage, of the happy and successful quest, there is little to relate. The Javanese are frolicsome and hospitable. There was a girl there with features that were as delicate as though

chiselled out of palest amber; and I remember she wore a most wonderful jewelled, helmet-like head-dress, and jingling bangles on her ankles, and when she danced she made most graceful and poetic gestures with her supple wrists—but that has nothing to do with isopods, absolutely nothing.

Letters from home came occasionally. Professor Farrago had returned to the Bronx and had been re-elected to the high office he had so nobly held when I first became associated with him.

Through his kindness and by his advice I remained for several years in the Far East, until a letter from him arrived recalling me and also announcing his own hurried and sudden departure for Florida. He also mentioned my promotion to the office of subcurator of department; so I started on my homeward voyage very much pleased with the world, and arrived in New York on April 1, 1904, ready for a rest to which I believed myself entitled. And the first thing that they handed me was a letter from Professor Farrago, summoning me South.

Chapter 13

The letter that started me—I was going to say startled me, but only imaginative people are startled—the letter, then, that started me from Bronx Park to the South I print without the permission of my superior, Professor Farrago. I have not obtained his permission, for the somewhat exciting reason that nobody knows where he is. Publicity being now recognized as the annihilator of mysteries, a benevolent purpose alone inspires me to publish a letter so strange, so pathetically remarkable, in view of what has recently occurred.

As I say, I had only just returned from Java with a valuable collection of undescribed isopods—an order of edriophthalmous crustaceans with seven free thoracic somites furnished with fourteen legs—and I beg my reader's pardon, but my reader will see the necessity for the author's absolute accuracy in insisting on detail, because the story that follows is a dangerous story for a scientist to tell, in view of the vast amount of nonsense and fiction in circulation masquerading as stories of scientific adventure.

I was, therefore, anticipating a delightful summer's work with pen and microscope, when on April 1st I received the following extraordinary letter from Professor Farrago:

"IN CAMP, LITTLE SPRITE LAKE,

"EVERGLADES, FLORIDA, *March 15, 1902.*

"MY DEAR MR. GILLAND,—On receipt of this communication you will immediately secure for me the following articles:

"One complete outfit of woman's clothing. "One camera. "One light steel cage, large enough for you to stand in. "One stenographer (male sex). "One five-pound steel tank, with siphon and hose

attachment. "One rifle and ammunition. "Three ounces rosium oxyde. "One ounce chlorate strontium.

"You will then, within twenty-four hours, set out with the stenographer and the supplies mentioned and join me in camp on Little Sprite Lake. This order is formal and admits of no delay. You will appreciate the necessity of absolute and unquestioning obedience when I tell you that I am practically on the brink of the most astonishing discovery recorded in natural history since Monsieur Zani discovered the purple-spotted zoombok in Nyanza; and that I depend upon you and your zeal and fidelity for success.

"I dare not, lest my letter fall into unscrupulous hands, convey to you more than a hint of what lies before us in these uncharted solitudes of the Everglades.

"You must read between the lines when I say that because one can see through a sheet of glass, the glass is none the less solid and palpable. One can see *through* it—if that is also seeing it; but one can nevertheless hold it and feel it and receive from it sensations of cold or heat according to its temperature.

"Certain jellyfish are absolutely transparent when in the water, and one can only know of their presence by accidental contact, not by sight.

"*Have you ever thought that possibly there might exist larger and more highly organized creatures transparent to eyesight, yet palpable to touch?*

"Little Sprite Lake is the jumping-off place; beyond lie the Everglades, the outskirts of which are haunted by the Seminoles, the interior of which have never been visited by man, as far as we know.

"As you are aware, no general survey of Florida has yet been made; there exist no maps of the Everglades south of Okeechobee; even Little Sprite Lake is but a vague blot on our maps. We know, of course, that south of the eleven thousand square miles of fresh water which is called Lake Okeechobee the Everglades form a vast, delta-like projection of thousands and thousands of square miles. Darkest Africa is no longer a mystery; but the Everglades to-day remain the sombre secret of our continent. And, to-day, this unknown expanse of swamps, barrens, forests, and lagoons is greater than in

the days of De Soto, because the entire region has been slowly rising.

"All this, my dear sir, you already know, and I ask your indulgence for recalling the facts to your memory. I do it for this reason—the search for *what I am seeking* may lead us to utter destruction; and therefore my formal orders to you should be modified to this extent: —do you volunteer? If you volunteer, my orders remain; if not, turn this letter over to Mr. Kingsley, who will find for me the companion I require.

"In the event of your coming, you must break your journey at False Cape and ask for an old man named Slunk. He will give you a packet; you will give him a dollar, and drive on to Cape Canaveral, and you will do what is to be done there. From there to Fort Kissimmee, to Okeechobee, traversing the lake to the Rita River, where I have marked the trail to Little Sprite.

"At Little Sprite I shall await you; beyond that point a merciful Providence alone can know what awaits us.

"Yours fraternally,

"FARRAGO.

"P.S.—I think that you had better make your will, and suggest the same idea to the stenographer who is to accompany you.

F."

And that was the letter I received while seated comfortably on the floor of my work-room, surrounded by innocent isopods, all patiently awaiting scientific investigation.

And this is what I did: Within twenty-four hours I had assembled the supplies required—the cage, the woman's clothing, tank, arms and ammunition, and the chemicals; I had secured accommodations, for that evening, on the Florida, Volusia, and Fort Lauderdale Railway as far as Citron City; and I had been interviewing stenographers all day long, the result of an innocently worded advertisement in the daily newspapers.

It was now very close to the time when I must summon a cab and drive to the ferry; and yet I was still shy one stenographer.

I had seen scores; they simply would not listen to the proposition. "Why does a gentleman in the backwoods of Florida want a stenographer?" they demanded; and as I had not the faintest idea, I

could only say so. I think the majority interviewed concluded I had escaped from a State institution.

As the time for departure approached I became desperate, urging and beseeching applicants to accompany me; but neither sympathy for my instant need nor desire for salary moved them.

I waited until the last moment, hoping against hope. Then, with a groan of despair, I seized luggage and raincoat, made for the door and flung it open, only to find myself face to face with an attractive young girl, apparently on the point of pressing the electric button.

"I'm sorry," I said, "but I have a train to catch."

She was noticeably attractive in her storm-coat and pretty hat, and I really was sorry—so sorry that I added:

"I have about twenty-seven seconds to place at your service before I go."

"Twenty will be sufficient," she replied, pleasantly. "I saw your advertisement for a stenographer—"

"We require a man," I interposed, hastily.

"Have you engaged him?"

"N-no."

We looked at each other.

"You wouldn't accept, anyway," I began.

"How do you know?"

"You wouldn't leave town, would you?"

"Yes, if you required it."

"What? Go to Florida?"

"Y-yes—if I must."

"But think of the alligators! Think of the snakes—big, bitey snakes!"

"Gracious!" she exclaimed, eyes growing bigger.

"Indians, too!—unreconciled, sulky Seminoles! Fevers! Mud-puddles! Spiders! And only fifty dollars a week—"

"I—I'll go," she stammered.

"Go?" I repeated, grimly; "then you've exactly two and three-quarter seconds left for preparations."

Instinctively she raised her little gloved hand and patted her hair. "I'm ready," she said, unsteadily.

"One extra second to make your will," I added, stunned by her self-possession.

"I—I have nothing to leave—nobody to leave it to," she said, smiling; "I am ready."

I took that extra second myself for a lightning course in reflection upon effects and consequences.

"It's silly, it's probably murder," I said, "but you're engaged! Now we must run for it!"

And that is how I came to engage the services of Miss Helen Barrison as stenographer.

Chapter 14

At noon on the second day I disembarked from the train at Citron City with all paraphernalia—cage, chemicals, arsenal, and stenographer; an accumulation of very dusty impedimenta—all but the stenographer. By three o'clock our hotel livery-rig was speeding along the beach at False Cape towards the tall lighthouse looming above the dunes.

The abode of a gentleman named Slunk was my goal. I sat brooding in the rickety carriage, still dazed by the rapidity of my flight from New York; the stenographer sat beside me, blue eyes bright with excitement, fair hair blowing in the sea-wind.

Our railway companionship had been of the slightest, also absolutely formal; for I was too absorbed in conjecturing the meaning of this journey to be more than absent-mindedly civil; and she, I fancy, had had time for repentance and perhaps for a little fright, though I could discover traces of neither.

I remember she left the train at some city or other where we were held for an hour; and out of the car-window I saw her returning with a brand-new grip sack.

She must have bought clothes, for she continued to remain cool and fresh in her summer shirt-waists and short outing skirt; and she looked immaculate now, sitting there beside me, the trace of a smile curving her red mouth.

"I'm looking for a personage named Slunk," I observed.

After a moment's silent consideration of the Atlantic Ocean she said, "When do my duties begin, Mr. Gilland?"

"The Lord alone knows," I replied, grimly. "Are you repenting of your bargain?"

"I am quite happy," she said, serenely.

Remorse smote me that I had consented to engage this frail, pink-and-ivory biped for an enterprise which lay outside the suburbs of Manhattan. I glanced guiltily at my victim; she sat there, the incarnation of New York piquancy—a translated denizen of the metropolis—a slender spirit of the back offices of sky-scrapers. Why had I lured her hither?—here where the heavy, lavender-tinted breakers thundered on a lost coast; here where above the dune-jungles vultures soared, and snowy-headed eagles, hulking along the sands, tore dead fish and yelped at us as we passed.

Strange waters, strange skies—a strange, lost land aquiver under an exotic sun; and there she sat with her wise eyes of a child, unconcerned, watching the world in perfect confidence.

"May I pay a little compliment to your pluck?" I asked, amused.

"Certainly," she said, smiling as the maid of Manhattan alone knows how to smile—shyly, inquiringly—with a lingering hint of laughter in the curled lips' corners. Then her sensitive features fell a trifle. "Not pluck," she said, "but necessity; I had no chance to choose, no time to wait. My last dollar, Mr. Gilland, is in my purse!"

With a gay little gesture she drew it from her shirt-front, then, smiling, sat turning it over and over in her lap.

The sun fell on her hands, gilding the smooth skin with the first tint of sunburn. Under the corners of her eyes above the rounded cheeks a pink stain lay like the first ripening flush on a wild strawberry. That, too, was the mark left by the caress of wind and sun. I had had no idea she was so pretty.

"I think we'll enjoy this adventure," I said; "don't you?"

"I try to make the best of things," she said, gazing off into the horizon haze. "Look," she added; "is that a man?"

A spot far away on the beach caught my eye. At first I thought it was a pelican—and small wonder, too, for the dumpy, waddling, goose-necked individual who loomed up resembled a heavy bottomed bird more than a human being.

"Do you suppose that could be Mr. Slunk?" asked the stenographer, as our vehicle drew nearer.

He looked as though his name ought to be Slunk; he was digging coquina clams, and he dug with a pecking motion like a water-turkey mastering a mullet too big for it.

His name was Slunk; he admitted it when I accused him. Our negro driver drew rein, and I descended to the sand and gazed on Mr. Slunk.

He was, as I have said, not impressive, even with the tremendous background of sky and ocean.

"I've come something over a thousand miles to see you," I said, reluctant to admit that I had come as far to see such a specimen of human architecture.

A weather-beaten grin stretched the skin that covered his face, and he shoved a hairy paw into the pockets of his overalls, digging deeply into profound depths. First he brought to light a twist of South Carolina tobacco, which he leisurely inserted in his mouth—not, apparently, for pleasure, but merely to get rid of it.

The second object excavated from the overalls was a small packet addressed to me. This he handed to me; I gravely handed him a silver dollar; he went back to his clam-digging, and I entered the carriage and drove on. All had been carried out according to the letter of my instructions so far, and my spirits brightened.

"If you don't mind I'll read my instructions," I said, in high good-humor.

"Pray do not hesitate," she said, smiling in sympathy.

So I opened the little packet and read:

"Drive to Cape Canaveral along the beach. You will find a gang of men at work on a government breakwater. The superintendent is Mr. Rowan. Show him this letter.

"FARRAGO."

Rather disappointed—for I had been expecting to find in the packet some key to the interesting mystery which had sent Professor Farrago into the Everglades—I thrust the missive into my pocket and resumed a study of the immediate landscape. It had not changed as we progressed: ocean, sand, low dunes crowned with impenetrable tangles of wild bay, sparkleberry, and live-oak, with here and there a weather-twisted palmetto sprawling, and here and there the battered blades of cactus and Spanish-bayonet thrust menacingly forward;

and over all the vultures, sailing, sailing—some mere circling motes lost in the blue above, some sheering the earth so close that their swiftly sweeping shadows slanted continually across our road.

"I detest a buzzard," I said, aloud.

"I thought they were crows," she confessed.

"Carrion-crows—yes.

"'The carrion-crows Sing, Caw! caw!'

—only they don't," I added, my song putting me in good-humor once more. And I glanced askance at the pretty stenographer.

"It is a pleasure to be employed by agreeable people," she said, innocently.

"Oh, I can be much more agreeable than that," I said.

"Is Professor Farrago—amusing?" she asked.

"Well—oh, certainly—but not in—in the way I am."

Suddenly it flashed upon me that my superior was a confirmed hater of unmarried women. I had clean forgotten it; and now the full import of what I had done scared me silent.

"Is anything the matter?" asked Miss Barrison.

"No—not yet," I said, ominously.

How on earth could I have overlooked that well-known fact. The hurry and anxiety, the stress of instant preparation and departure, had clean driven it from my absent-minded head.

Jogging on over the sand, I sat silent, cudgelling my brains for a solution of the disastrous predicament I had gotten into. I pictured the astonished rage of my superior—my probable dismissal from employment—perhaps the general overturning and smash-up of the entire expedition.

A distant, dark object on the beach concentrated my distracted thoughts; it must be the breakwater at Cape Canaveral. And it was the breakwater, swarming with negro workmen, who were swinging great blocks of coquina into cemented beds, singing and whistling at their labor.

I forgot my predicament when I saw a thin white man in sun-helmet and khaki directing the work from the beach; and as our horses plodded up, I stepped out and hailed him by name.

"Yes, my name is Rowan," he said, instantly, turning to meet me. His sharp, clear eyes included the vehicle and the stenographer, and

he lifted his helmet, then looked squarely at me.

"My name is Gilland," I said, dropping my voice and stepping nearer. "I have just come from Bronx Park, New York."

He bowed, waiting for something more from me; so I presented my credentials.

His formal manner changed at once. "Come over here and let us talk a bit," he said, cordially—then hesitated, glancing at Miss Barrison—"if your wife would excuse us—"

The pretty stenographer colored, and I dryly set Mr. Rowan right—which appeared to disturb him more than his mistake.

"Pardon me, Mr. Gilland, but you do not propose to take this young girl into the Everglades, do you?"

"That's what I had proposed to do," I said, brusquely.

Perfectly aware that I resented his inquiry, he cast a perplexed and troubled glance at her, then slowly led the way to a great block of sun-warmed coquina, where he sat down, motioning me to do the same.

"I see," he said, "that you don't know just where you are going or just what you are expected to do."

"No, I don't," I said.

"Well, I'll tell you, then. You are going into the devil's own country to look for something that I fled five hundred miles to avoid."

"Is that so?" I said, uneasily.

"That is so, Mr. Gilland."

"Oh! And what is this object that I am to look for and from which you fled five hundred miles?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know what you ran away from?"

"No, sir. Perhaps if I had known I should have run a thousand miles."

We eyed one another.

"You think, then, that I'd better send Miss Barrison back to New York?" I asked.

"I certainly do. It may be murder to take her."

"Then I'll do it!" I said, nervously. "Back she goes from the first railroad station."

In a flash the thought came to me that here was a way to avoid the wrath of Professor Farrago—and a good excuse, too. He might forgive my not bringing a man as stenographer in view of my limited time; he never would forgive my presenting him with a woman.

"She must go back," I repeated; and it rather surprised me to find myself already anticipating loneliness—something that never in all my travels had I experienced before.

"By the first train," I added, firmly, disliking Mr. Rowan without any reason except that he had suddenly deprived me of my stenographer.

"What I have to tell you," he began, lighting a cigarette, the mate to which I declined, "is this: Three years ago, before I entered this contracting business, I was in the government employ as officer in the Coast Survey. Our duties took us into Florida waters; we were months at a time working on shore."

He pulled thoughtfully at his cigarette and blew a light cloud into the air.

"I had leave for a month once; and like an ass I prepared to spend it in a hunting-trip among the Everglades."

He crossed his lean legs and gazed meditatively at his cigarette.

"I believe," he went on, "that we penetrated the Everglades farther than any white man who ever lived to return. There's nothing very dismal about the Everglades—the greater part, I mean. You get high and low hummock, marshes, creeks, lakes, and all that. If you get lost, you're a goner. If you acquire fever, you're as well off as the seraphim—and not a whit better. There are the usual animals there—bears (little black fellows) lynxes, deer, panthers, alligators, and a few stray crocodiles. As for snakes, of course they're there, moccasins a-plenty, some rattlers, but, after all, not as many snakes as one finds in Alabama, or even northern Florida and Georgia.

"The Seminoles won't help you—won't even talk to you. They're a sullen pack—but not murderous, as far as I know. Beyond their inner limits lie the unknown regions."

He bit the wet end from his cigarette.

"I went there," he said; "I came out as soon as I could."

"Why?"

"Well—for one thing, my companion died of fright."

"Fright? What at?"

"Well, there's something in there."

"What?"

He fixed a penetrating gaze on me. "I don't know, Mr. Gilland."

"Did you see anything to frighten you?" I insisted.

"No, but I felt something." He dropped his cigarette and ground it into the sand viciously. "To cut it short," he said, "I am most unwillingly led to believe that there are—creatures—of some sort in the Everglades—living creatures quite as large as you or I—and that they are perfectly transparent—as transparent as a colorless jellyfish."

Instantly the veiled import of Professor Farrago's letter was made clear to me. He, too, believed that.

"It embarrasses me like the devil to say such a thing," continued Rowan, digging in the sand with his spurred heels. "It seems so—so like a whopping lie—it seems so childish and ridiculous—so cursed cheap! But I fled; and there you are. I might add," he said, indifferently, "that I have the ordinary portion of courage allotted to normal men."

"But what do you believe these—these animals to be?" I asked, fascinated.

"I don't know." An obstinate look came into his eyes. "I don't know, and I absolutely refuse to speculate for the benefit of anybody. I wouldn't do it for my friend Professor Farrago; and I'm not going to do it for you," he ended, laughing a rather grim laugh that somehow jarred me into realizing the amazing import of his story. For I did not doubt it, strange as it was—fantastic, incredible though it sounded in the ears of a scientist.

What it was that carried conviction I do not know—perhaps the fact that my superior credited it; perhaps the manner of narration. Told in quiet, commonplace phrases, by an exceedingly practical and unimaginative young man who was plainly embarrassed in the telling, the story rang out like a shout in a cañon, startling because of the absolute lack of emphasis employed in the telling.

"Professor Farrago asked me to speak of this to no one except the man who should come to his assistance. He desired the first chance of clearing this—this rather perplexing matter. No doubt he didn't

want exploring parties prowling about him," added Rowan, smiling. "But there's no fear of that, I fancy. I never expect to tell that story again to anybody; I shouldn't have told him, only somehow it's worried me for three years, and though I was deadly afraid of ridicule, I finally made up my mind that science ought to have a hack at it.

"When I was in New York last winter I summoned up courage and wrote Professor Farrago. He came to see me at the Holland House that same evening; I told him as much as I ever shall tell anybody. That is all, Mr. Gilland."

For a long time I sat silent, musing over the strange words. After a while I asked him whether Professor Farrago was supplied with provisions; and he said he was; that a great store of staples and tins of concentrated rations had been carried in as far as Little Sprite Lake; that Professor Farrago was now there alone, having insisted upon dismissing all those he had employed.

"There was no practical use for a guide," added Rowan, "because no cracker, no Indian, and no guide knows the region beyond the Seminole country."

I rose, thanking him and offering my hand. He took it and shook it in manly fashion, saying: "I consider Professor Farrago a very brave man; I may say the same of any man who volunteers to accompany him. Good-bye, Mr. Gilland; I most earnestly wish for your success. Professor Farrago left this letter for you."

And that was all. I climbed back into the rickety carriage, carrying my unopened letter; the negro driver cracked his whip and whistled, and the horses trotted inland over a fine shell road which was to lead us across Verbena Junction to Citron City. Half an hour later we crossed the tracks at Verbena and turned into a broad marl road. This aroused me from my deep and speculative reverie, and after a few moments I asked Miss Barrison's indulgence and read the letter from Professor Farrago which Mr. Rowan had given me:

"DEAR MR. GILLAND,—You now know all I dared not write, fearing to bring a swarm of explorers about my ears in case the letter was lost, and found by unscrupulous meddlers. If you still are willing to volunteer, knowing all that I know, join me as soon as possible. If family considerations deter you from taking what perhaps is an

insane risk, I shall not expect you to join me. In that event, return to New York immediately and send Kingsley.

"Yours, F."

"What the deuce is the matter with him!" I exclaimed, irritably. "I'll take any chances Kingsley does!"

Miss Barrison looked up in surprise.

"Miss Barrison," I said, plunging into the subject headfirst, "I'm extremely sorry, but I have news that forces me to believe the journey too dangerous for you to attempt, so I think that it would be much better—" The consternation in her pretty face checked me.

"I'm awfully sorry," I muttered, appalled by her silence.

"But—but you engaged me!"

"I know it—I should not have done it. I only—"

"But you did engage me, didn't you?"

"I believe that I did—er—oh, of course—"

"But a verbal contract is binding between honorable people, isn't it, Mr. Gilland?"

"Yes, but—"

"And ours was a verbal contract; and in consideration you paid me my first week's salary, and I bought shirt-waists and a short skirt and three changes of—and tooth-brushes and—"

"I know, I know," I groaned. "But I'll fix all that."

"You can't if you break your contract."

"Why not?"

"Because," she said, flushing up, "I should not accept."

"You don't understand—"

"Really I do. You are going into a dangerous country and you're afraid I'll be frightened."

"It's something like that."

"Tell me what are the dangers?"

"Alligators, big, bitey snakes—"

"Oh, you've said all that before!"

"Seminoles—"

"And that too. What else is there? Did the young man in the sun-helmet tell you of something worse?"

"Yes—much worse! Something so dreadfully horrible that—"

"What?"

"I am not at liberty to tell you, Miss Barrison," I said, striving to appear shocked.

"It would not make any difference anyway," she observed, calmly. "I'm not afraid of anything in the world."

"Yes, you are!" I said. "Listen to me; I'd be awfully glad to have you go—I—I really had no idea how I'd miss you—miss such pleasant companionship. But it is not possible—" The recollection of Professor Farrago's aversion suddenly returned. "No, no," I said, "it can't be done. I'm most unhappy over this mistake of mine; please don't look as though you were ready to cry!"

"Don't discharge me, Mr. Gilland," she said.

"I'm a brute to do it, but I must; I was a bigger brute to engage you, but I did. Don't—please don't look at me that way, Miss Barrison! As a matter of fact, I'm tender-hearted and I can't endure it."

"If you only knew what I had been through you wouldn't send me away," she said, in a low voice. "It took my last penny to clothe myself and pay for the last lesson at the college of stenography. I—I lived on almost nothing for weeks; every respectable place was filled; I walked and walked and walked, and nobody wanted me—they all required people with experience—and how can I have experience until I begin, Mr. Gilland? I was perfectly desperate when I went to see you, knowing that you had advertised for a man—" The slightest break in her clear voice scared me.

"I'm not going to cry," she said, striving to smile. "If I must go, I will go. I—I didn't mean to say all this—but—but I've been so—so discouraged;—and you were not very cross with me—"

Smitten with remorse, I picked up her hand and fell to patting it violently, trying to think of something to say. The exercise did not appear to stimulate my wits.

"Then—then I'm to go with you?" she asked.

"I will see," I said, weakly, "but I fear there's trouble ahead for this expedition."

"I fear there is," she agreed, in a cheerful voice. "You have a rifle and a cage in your luggage. Are you going to trap Indians and have me report their language?"

"No, I'm not going to trap Indians," I said, sharply. "They may trap us—but that's a detail. What I want to say to you is this: Professor

Farrago detests unmarried women, and I forgot it when I engaged you."

"Oh, is that all?" she asked, laughing.

"Not all, but enough to cost me my position."

"How absurd! Why, there are millions of things we might do!—millions!"

"What's one of them?" I inquired.

"Why, we might pretend to be married!" Her frank and absolutely innocent delight in this suggestion was refreshing, but troubling.

"We would have to be demonstrative to make that story go," I said.

"Why? Well-bred people are not demonstrative in public," she retorted, turning a trifle pink.

"No, but in private—"

"I think there is no necessity for carrying a pleasantry into our private life," she said, in a perfectly amiable voice. "Anyway, if Professor Farrago's feelings are to be spared, no sacrifice on the part of a mere girl could be too great," she added, gayly; "I will wear men's clothes if you wish."

"You may have to anyhow in the jungle," I said; "and as it's not an uncommon thing these days, nobody would ever take you for anything except what you are—a very wilful and plucky and persistent and—"

"And what, Mr. Gilland?"

"And attractive," I muttered.

"Thank you, Mr. Gilland."

"You're welcome," I snapped. The near whistle of a locomotive warned us, and I rose in the carriage, looking out across the sand-hills.

"That is probably our train," observed the pretty stenographer.

"*Our* train!"

"Yes; isn't it?"

"Then you insist—"

"Ah, no, Mr. Gilland; I only trust implicitly in my employer."

"We'll wait till we get to Citron City," I said, weakly; "then it will be time enough to discuss the situation, won't it?"

"Yes, indeed," she said, smiling; but she knew, and I already feared, that the situation no longer admitted of discussion. In a few

moments more we emerged, without warning, from the scrub-crested sand-hills into the single white street of Citron City, where China-trees hung heavy with bloom, and magnolias, already set with perfumed candelabra, spread soft, checkered shadows over the marl.

The train lay at the station, oceans of heavy, black smoke lazily flowing from the locomotive; negroes were hoisting empty fruit-crates aboard the baggage-car, through the door of which I caught a glimpse of my steel cage and remaining paraphernalia, all securely crated.

"Telegram hyah foh Mistuh Gilland," remarked the operator, lounging at his window as we descended from our dusty vehicle. He had not addressed himself to anybody in particular, but I said that I was Mr. Gilland, and he produced the envelope. "Toted in from Okeechobee?" he inquired, listlessly.

"Probably; it's signed 'Farrago,' isn't it?"

"It's foh yoh, suh, I reckon," said the operator, handing it out with a yawn. Then he removed his hat and fanned his head, which was perfectly bald.

I opened the yellow envelope. "Get me a good dog with points," was the laconic message; and it irritated me to receive such idiotic instructions at such a time and in such a place. A good dog? Where the mischief could I find a dog in a town consisting of ten houses and a water-tank? I said as much to the bald-headed operator, who smiled wearily and replaced his hat: "Dawg? They's moh houn'-dawgs in Citron City than they's wood-ticks to keep them busy. I reckon a dollah 'll do a heap foh you, suh."

"Could you get me a dog for a dollar?" I asked;—"one with points?"

"Points? I sholy can, suh;—plenty of points. What kind of dawg do yoh requiah, suh?—live dawg? daid dawg? houn'-dawg? raid-dawg? hawg-dawg? coon-dawg?—"

The locomotive emitted a long, lazy, softly modulated and thoroughly Southern toot. I handed the operator a silver dollar, and he presently emerged from his office and slouched off up the street, while I walked with Miss Barrison to the station platform, where I resumed the discussion of her future movements.

"You are very young to take such a risk," I said, gravely. "Had I not better buy your ticket back to New York? The north-bound train meets this one. I suppose we are waiting for it now—" I stopped, conscious of her impatience.

Her face flushed brightly: "Yes; I think it best. I have embarrassed you too long already—"

"Don't say that!" I muttered. "I—I—shall be deadly bored without you."

"I am not an entertainer, only a stenographer," she said, curtly. "Please get me my ticket, Mr. Gilland."

She gazed at me from the car-platform; the locomotive tooted two drawling toots.

"It is for your sake," I said, avoiding her gaze as the far-off whistle of the north-bound express came floating out of the blue distance.

She did not answer; I fished out my watch, regarding it in silence, listening to the hum of the approaching train, which ought presently to bear her away into the North, where nothing could menace her except the brilliant pitfalls of a Christian civilization. But I stood there, temporizing, unable to utter a word as her train shot by us with a rush, slower, slower, and finally stopped, with a long-drawn sigh from the air-brakes.

At that instant the telegraph-operator appeared, carrying a dog by the scruff of the neck—a sad-eyed, ewe-necked dog, from the four corners of which dangled enormous, cushion-like paws. He yelped when he beheld me. Miss Barrison leaned down from the car-platform and took the animal into her arms, uttering a suppressed exclamation of pity as she lifted him.

"You have your hands full," she said to me; "I'll take him into the car for you."

She mounted the steps; I followed with the valises, striving to get a good view of my acquisition over her shoulder.

"That isn't the kind of dog I wanted!" I repeated again and again, inspecting the animal as it sprawled on the floor of the car at the edge of Miss Barrison's skirt. "That dog is all voice and feet and emotion! What makes it stick up its paws like that? I don't want that dog and I'm not going to identify myself with it! Where's the operator —"

I turned towards the car-window; the operator's bald head was visible on a line with the sill, and I made motions at him. He bowed with courtly grace, as though I were thanking him.

"I'm not!" I cried, shaking my head. "I wanted a dog with points—not the kind of points that stick up all over this dog. Take him away!"

The operator's head appeared to be gliding out of my range of vision; then the windows of the north-bound train slid past, faster and faster. A melancholy grace-note from the dog, a jolt, and I turned around, appalled.

"This train is going," I stammered, "and you are on it!"

Miss Barrison sprang up and started towards the door, and I sped after her.

"I can jump," she said, breathlessly, edging out to the platform; "please let me! There is time yet—if you only wouldn't hold me—so tight—"

A few moments later we walked slowly back together through the car and took seats facing one another.

Between us sat the hound-dog, a prey to melancholy unutterable.

Chapter 15

It was on Sunday when I awoke to the realization that I had quitted civilization and was afloat on an unfamiliar body of water in an open boat containing—

One light steel cage, One rifle and ammunition, One stenographer, Three ounces rosium oxide, One hound-dog, Two valises.

A playful wave slopped over the bow and I lost count; but the pretty stenographer made the inventory, while I resumed the oars, and the dog punctured the primeval silence with staccato yelps.

A few minutes later everything and everybody was accounted for; the sky was blue and the palms waved, and several species of dicky-birds tuned up as I pulled with powerful strokes out into the sunny waters of Little Sprite Lake, now within a few miles of my journey's end.

From ponds hidden in the marshes herons rose in lazily laborious flight, flapping low across the water; high in the cypress yellow-eyed ospreys bent crested heads to watch our progress; sun-baked alligators, lying heavily in the shoreward sedge, slid open, glassy eyes as we passed.

"Even the 'gators make eyes at you," I said, resting on my oars.

We were on terms of badinage.

"Who was it who shed crocodile tears at the prospect of shipping me North?" she inquired.

"Speaking of tears," I observed, "somebody is likely to shed a number when Professor Farrago is picked up."

"Pooh!" she said, and snapped her pretty, sun-tanned fingers; and I resumed the oars in time to avoid shipwreck on a large mud-bar.

She reclined in the stern, serenely occupied with the view, now and then caressing the discouraged dog, now and then patting her hair where the wind had loosened a bright strand.

"If Professor Farrago didn't expect a woman stenographer," she said, abruptly, "why did he instruct you to bring a complete outfit of woman's clothing?"

"I don't know," I said, tartly.

"But you bought them. Are they for a young woman or an old woman?"

"I don't know; I sent a messenger to a department store. I don't know what he bought."

"Didn't you look them over?"

"No. Why? I should have been no wiser. I fancy they're all right, because the bill was eighteen hundred dollars—"

The pretty stenographer sat up abruptly.

"Is that much?" I asked, uneasily. "I've always heard women's clothing was expensive. Wasn't it enough? I told the boy to order the best;—Professor Farrago always requires the very best scientific instruments, and—I listed the clothes as scientific accessories—that being the object of this expedition—*What* are you laughing at?"

When it pleased her to recover her gravity she announced her desire to inspect and repack the clothing; but I refused.

"They're for Professor Farrago," I said. "I don't know what he wants of them. I don't suppose he intends to wear 'em and caper about the jungle, but they're his. I got them because he told me to. I bought a cage, too, to fit myself, but I don't suppose he means to put me in it. Perhaps," I added, "he may invite you into it."

"Let me refold the gowns," she pleaded, persuasively. "What does a clumsy man know about packing such clothing as that? If you don't, they'll be ruined. It's a shame to drag those boxes about through mud and water!"

So we made a landing, and lifted out and unlocked the boxes. All I could see inside were mounds of lace and ribbons, and with a vague idea that Miss Barrison needed no assistance I returned to the boat and sat down to smoke until she was ready.

When she summoned me her face was flushed and her eyes bright.

"Those are certainly the most beautiful things!" she said, softly. "Why, it is like a bride's trousseau—absolutely complete—all except the bridal gown—"

"Isn't there a dress there?" I exclaimed, in alarm.

"No—not a day-dress."

"Night-dresses!" I shrieked. "He doesn't want women's night-dresses! He's a bachelor! Good Heavens! I've done it this time!"

"But—but who is to wear them?" she asked.

"How do I know? I don't know anything; I can only presume that he doesn't intend to open a department store in the Everglades. And if any lady is to wear garments in his vicinity, I assume that those garments are to be anything except diaphanous!… Please take your seat in the boat, Miss Barrison. I want to row and think."

I had had my fill of exercise and thought when, about four o'clock in the afternoon, Miss Barrison directed my attention to a point of palms jutting out into the water about a mile to the southward.

"That's Farrago!" I exclaimed, catching sight of a United States flag floating majestically from a bamboo-pole. "Give me the megaphone, if you please."

She handed me the instrument; I hailed the shore; and presently a man appeared under the palms at the water's edge.

"Hello!" I roared, trying to inject cheerfulness into the hollow bellow. "How are you, professor?"

The answer came distinctly across the water:

"*Who* is that with you?"

My lips were buried in the megaphone; I strove to speak; I only produced a ghastly, chuckling sound.

"Of course you expect to tell the truth," observed the pretty stenographer, quietly.

I removed my lips from the megaphone and looked around at her. She returned my gaze with a disturbing smile.

"I want to mitigate the blow," I said, hoarsely. "Tell me how."

"I'm sure I don't know," she said, sweetly.

"Well, *I* do!" I fairly barked, and seizing the megaphone again, I set it to my lips and roared, "My fiancée!"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Miss Barrison, in consternation, "I thought you were going to tell the truth!"

"Don't do that or you'll upset us," I snapped—"I'm telling the truth; I've engaged myself to you; I did it mentally before I bellowed."

"But—"

"You know as well as I do what engagements mean," I said, picking up the oars and digging them deep in the blue water.

She assented uncertainly.

A few minutes more of vigorous rowing brought us to a muddy landing under a cluster of tall palmettos, where a gasoline launch lay. Professor Farrago came down to the shore as I landed, and I walked ahead to meet him. He was the maddest man I ever saw. But I was his match, for I was desperate.

"What the devil—" he began, under his breath.

"Nonsense!" I said, deliberately. "An engaged woman is practically married already, because marriages are made in heaven."

"Good Lord!" he gasped, "are you mad, Gilland? I sent for a stenographer—"

"Miss Barrison is a stenographer," I said, calmly; and before he could recover I had presented him, and left them face to face, washing my hands of the whole affair.

Unloading the boat and carrying the luggage up under the palms, I heard her saying:

"No, I am not in the least afraid of snakes, and I am quite ready to begin my duties."

And he: "Mr. Gilland is a young man who—er—lacks practical experience."

And she: "Mr. Gilland has been most thoughtful for my comfort. The journey has been perfectly heavenly."

And he, clumsily: "Ahem!—the—er—celestial aspect of your journey has—er—doubtless been colored by—er—the prospect of your—er—approaching nuptials—"

She, hastily: "Oh, I do not think so, professor."

"Idiot!" I muttered, dragging the dog to the shore, where his yelps brought the professor hurrying.

"Is *that* the dog?" he inquired, adjusting his spectacles.

"That's the dog," I said. "He's full of points, you see?"

"Oh," mused the professor; "I thought he was full of—" He hesitated, inspecting the animal, who, nose to the ground, stood

investigating a smell of some sort.

"See," I said, with enthusiasm, "he's found a scent; he's trailing it already! Now he's rolling on it!"

"He's rolling on one of our concentrated food lozenges," said the professor, dryly. "Tie him up, Mr. Gilland, and ask Mrs. Gilland to come up to camp. Your room is ready."

"Rooms," I corrected; "she isn't Mrs. Gilland yet," I added, with a forced smile.

"But you're practically married," observed the professor, "as you pointed out to me. And if she's practically Mrs. Gilland, why not say so?"

"Don't, all the same," I snarled.

"But marriages are made in—"

I cast a desperate eye upon him.

From that moment, whenever we were alone together, he made a target of me. I never had supposed him humorously vindictive; he was, and his apparently innocent mistakes almost turned my hair gray.

But to Miss Barrison he was kind and courteous, and for a time over-serious. Observing him, I could never detect the slightest symptom of dislike for her sex—a failing which common rumor had always credited him with to the verge of absolute rudeness.

On the contrary, it was perfectly plain to anybody that he liked her. There was in his manner towards her a mixture of business formality and the deferential attitude of a gentleman.

We were seated, just before sunset, outside of the hut built of palmetto logs, when Professor Farrago, addressing us both, began the explanation of our future duties.

Miss Barrison, it appeared, was to note everything said by himself, making several shorthand copies by evening. In other words, she was to report every scrap of conversation she heard while in the Everglades. And she nodded intelligently as he finished, and drew pad and pencil from the pocket of her walking-skirt, jotting down his instructions as a beginning. I could see that he was pleased.

"The reason I do this," he said, "is because I do not wish to hide anything that transpires while we are on this expedition. Only the most scrupulously minute record can satisfy me; no details are too

small to merit record; I demand and I court from my fellow-scientists and from the public the fullest investigation."

He smiled slightly, turning towards me.

"You know, Mr. Gilland, how dangerous to the reputation of a scientific man is any line of investigation into the unusual. If a man once is even suspected of charlatanism, of sensationalism, of turning his attention to any phenomena not strictly within the proper pale of scientific investigation, that man is doomed to ridicule; his profession disowns him; he becomes a man without honor, without authority. Is it not so?"

"Yes," I said.

"Therefore," he resumed, thoughtfully, "as I do most firmly believe in the course I am now pursuing, whether I succeed or fail I desire a true and minute record made, hiding nothing of what may be said or done. A stenographer alone can give this to the world, while I can only supplement it with a description of events—if I live to transcribe them."

Sunk in profound reverie he sat there silent under the great, smooth palm-tree—a venerable figure in his yellow dressing-gown and carpet slippers. Seated side by side, we waited, a trifle awed. I could hear the soft breathing of the pretty stenographer beside me.

"First of all," said Professor Farrago, looking up, "I must be able to trust those who are here to aid me."

"I—I will be faithful," said the girl, in a low voice.

"I do not doubt you, my child," he said; "nor you, Gilland. And so I am going to tell you this much now—more, I hope, later."

And he sat up straight, lifting an impressive forefinger.

"Mr. Rowan, lately an officer of our Coast Survey, wrote me a letter from the Holland House in New York—a letter so strange that, on reading it, I immediately repaired to his hotel, where for hours we talked together.

"The result of that conference is this expedition.

"I have now been here two months, and I am satisfied of certain facts. First, there do exist in this unexplored wilderness certain forms of life which are solid and palpable, but transparent and practically invisible. Second, these living creatures belong to the animal kingdom, are warm-blooded vertebrates, possess powers of

locomotion, but whether that of flight I am not certain. Third, they appear to possess such senses as we enjoy—smell, touch, sight, hearing, and no doubt the sense of taste. Fourth, their skin is smooth to the touch, and the temperature of the epidermis appears to approximate that of a normal human being. Fifth and last, whether bipeds or quadrupeds I do not know, though all evidence appears to confirm my theory that they walk erect. One pair of their limbs appear to terminate in a sort of foot—like a delicately shaped human foot, except that there appear to be no toes. The other pair of limbs terminate in something that, from the single instance I experienced, seemed to resemble soft but firm antennæ or, perhaps, digitated palpi—"

"Feelers!" I blurted out.

"I don't know, but I think so. Once, when I was standing in the forest, perfectly aware that creatures I could not see had stealthily surrounded me, the tension was brought to a crisis when over my face, from cheek to chin, stole a soft something, brushing the skin as delicately as a child's fingers might brush it."

"Good Lord!" I breathed.

A care-worn smile crept into his eyes. "A test for nerves, you think, Mr. Gilland? I agree with you. Nobody fears what anybody can see."

There came the slightest movement beside me.

"Are you trembling?" I asked, turning.

"I was writing," she replied, steadily. "Did my elbow touch you?"

"By-the-way," said Professor Farrago, "I fear I forgot to congratulate you upon your choice of a stenographer, Mr. Gilland."

A rosy light stole over her pale face.

"Am I to record that too?" she asked, raising her blue eyes.

"Certainly," he replied, gravely.

"But, professor," I began, a prey to increasing excitement, "do you propose to attempt the capture of one of these animals?"

"That is what the cage is for," he said. "I supposed you had guessed that."

"I had," murmured the pretty stenographer.

"I do not doubt it," said Professor Farrago, gravely.

"What are the chemicals for—and the tank and hose attachment?"

"Think, Mr. Gilland."

"I can't; I'm almost stunned by what you tell me."

He laughed. "The rosium oxide and salts of strontium are to be dumped into the tank together. They'll effervesce, of course."

"Of course," I muttered.

"And I can throw a rose-colored spray over any object by the hose attachment, can't I?"

"Yes."

"Well, I tried it on a transparent jelly-fish and it became perfectly visible and of a beautiful rose-color: and I tried it on rock-crystal, and on glass, and on pure gelatine, and all became suffused with a delicate pink glow, which lasted for hours or minutes according to the substance… . Now you understand, don't you?"

"Yes; you want to see what sort of creature you have to deal with."

"Exactly; so when I've trapped it I am going to spray it." He turned half humorously towards the stenographer: "I fancy you understood long before Mr. Gilland did."

"I don't think so," she said, with a sidelong lifting of the heavy lashes; and I caught the color of her eyes for a second.

"You see how Miss Barrison spares your feelings," observed Professor Farrago, dryly. "She owes you little gratitude for bringing her here, yet she proves a generous victim."

"Oh, I am very grateful for this rarest of chances!" she said, shyly. "To be among the first in the world to discover such wonders ought to make me very grateful to the man who gave me the opportunity."

"Do you mean Mr. Gilland?" asked the professor, laughing.

I had never before seen Professor Farrago laugh such a care-free laugh; I had never suspected him of harboring even an embryo of the social graces. Dry as dust, sapless as steel, precise as the magnetic needle, he had hitherto been to me the mummified embodiment of science militant. Now, in the guise of a perfectly human and genial old gentleman, I scarcely recognized my superior of the Bronx Park society. And as a woman-hater he was a miserable failure.

"Heavens," I thought to myself, "am I becoming jealous of my revered professor's social success with a stray stenographer?" I felt mean, and I probably looked it, and I was glad that telepathy did not permit Miss Barrison to record my secret and unworthy ruminations.

The professor was saying: "These transparent creatures break off berries and fruits and branches; I have seen a flower, too, plucked from its stem by invisible digits and borne swiftly through the forest—only the flower visible, apparently speeding through the air and out of sight among the thickets.

"I have found the footprints that I described to you, usually on the edge of a stream or in the soft loam along some forest lake or lost lagoon.

"Again and again I have been conscious in the forest that unseen eyes were fixed on me, that unseen shapes were following me. Never but that one time did these invisible creatures close in around me and venture to touch me.

"They may be weak; their structure may be frail, and they may be incapable of violence or harm, but the depth of the footprints indicates a weight of at least one hundred and thirty pounds, and it certainly requires some muscular strength to break off a branch of wild guavas."

He bent his noble head, thoughtfully regarding the design on his slippers.

"What was the rifle for?" I asked.

"Defence, not aggression," he said, simply.

"And the camera?"

"A camera record is necessary in these days of bad artists."

I hesitated, glancing at Miss Barrison. She was still writing, her pretty head bent over the pad in her lap.

"And the clothing?" I asked, carelessly.

"Did you get it?" he demanded.

"Of course—" I glanced at Miss Barrison. "There's no use writing down everything, is there?"

"Everything must be recorded," said Professor Farrago, inflexibly. "What clothing did you buy?"

"I forgot the gown," I said, getting red about the ears.

"Forgot the gown!" he repeated.

"Yes—one kind of gown—the day kind. I—I got the other kind."

He was annoyed; so was I. After a moment he got up, and crossing to the log cabin, opened one of the boxes of apparel.

"Is it what you wanted?" I inquired.

"Y-es, I presume so," he replied, visibly perplexed.

"It's the best to be had," said I.

"That's quite right," he said, musingly. "We use only the best of everything at Bronx Park. It is traditional with us, you know."

Curiosity pushed me. "Well, what on earth is it for?" I broke out.

He looked at me gravely over the tops of his spectacles—a striking and inspiring figure in his yellow flannel dressing-gown and slippers.

"I shall tell you some day—perhaps," he said, mildly. "Good-night, Miss Barrison; good-night, Mr. Gilland. You will find extra blankets on your bunk—"

"What!" I cried.

"Bunks," he said, and shut the door.

Chapter 16

"There is something weird about this whole proceeding," I observed to the pretty stenographer next morning.

"These pies will be weird if you don't stop talking to me," she said, opening the doors of Professor Farrago's portable camping-oven and peeping in at the fragrant pastry.

The professor had gone off somewhere into the woods early that morning. As he was not in the habit of talking to himself, the services of Miss Barrison were not required. Before he started, however, he came to her with a request for a dozen pies, the construction of which he asked if she understood. She had been to cooking-school in more prosperous days, and she mentioned it; so at his earnest solicitation she undertook to bake for him twelve apple-pies; and she was now attempting it, assisted by advice from me.

"Are they burned?" I asked, sniffing the air.

"No, they are not burned, Mr. Gilland, but my finger is," she retorted, stepping back to examine the damage.

I offered sympathy and witch-hazel, but she would have none of my offerings, and presently returned to her pies.

"We can't eat all that pastry," I protested.

"Professor Farrago said they were not for us to eat," she said, dusting each pie with powdered sugar.

"Well, what are they for? The dog? Or are they simply objets d'art to adorn the shanty—"

"You annoy me," she said.

"The pies annoy me; won't you tell me what they're for?"

"I have a pretty fair idea what they're for," she observed, tossing her head. "Haven't you?"

"No. What?"

"These pies are for bait."

"To bait hooks with?" I exclaimed.

"Hooks! No, you silly man. They're for baiting the cage. He means to trap these transparent creatures in a cage baited with pie."

She laughed scornfully; inserted the burned tip of her finger in her mouth and stood looking at me defiantly like a flushed and bright-eyed school-girl.

"You think you're teasing me," she said; "but you do not realize what a singularly slow-minded young man you are."

I stopped laughing. "How did you come to the conclusion that pies were to be used for such a purpose?" I asked.

"I deduce," she observed, with an airy wave of her disengaged hand.

"Your deductions are weird—like everything else in this vicinity. Pies to catch invisible monsters? Pooh!"

"You're not particularly complimentary, are you?" she said.

"Not particularly; but I could be, with you for my inspiration. I could even be enthusiastic—"

"About my pies?"

"No—about your eyes."

"You are very frivolous—for a scientist," she said, scornfully; "please subdue your enthusiasm and bring me some wood. This fire is almost out."

When I had brought the wood, she presented me with a pail of hot water and pointed at the dishes on the breakfast-table.

"Never!" I cried, revolted.

"Then I suppose I must do them—"

She looked pensively at her scorched finger-tip, and, pursing up her red lips, blew a gentle breath to cool it.

"I'll do the dishes," I said.

Splashing and slushing the cups and saucers about in the hot water, I reflected upon the events of the last few days. The dog, stupefied by unwonted abundance of food, lay in the sunshine, sleeping the sleep of repletion; the pretty stenographer, all rosy from

her culinary exertions, was removing the pies and setting them in neat rows to cool.

"There," she said, with a sigh; "now I will dry the dishes for you… . You didn't mention the fact, when you engaged me, that I was also expected to do general housework."

"I didn't engage you," I said, maliciously; "you engaged me, you know."

She regarded me disdainfully, nose uptilted.

"How thoroughly disagreeable you can be!" she said. "Dry your own dishes. I'm going for a stroll."

"May I join—"

"You may *not*! I shall go so far that you cannot possibly discover me."

I watched her forestward progress; she sauntered for about thirty yards along the lake and presently sat down in plain sight under a huge live-oak.

A few moments later I had completed my task as general bottle-washer, and I cast about for something to occupy me.

First I approached and politely caressed the satiated dog. He woke up, regarded me with dully meditative eyes, yawned, and went to sleep again. Never a flop of tail to indicate gratitude for blandishments, never the faintest symptom of canine appreciation.

Chilled by my reception, I moused about for a while, poking into boxes and bundles; then raised my head and inspected the landscape. Through the vista of trees the pink shirt-waist of the pretty stenographer glimmered like a rose blooming in the wilderness.

From whatever point I viewed the prospect that pink spot seemed to intrude; I turned my back and examined the jungle, but there it was repeated in a hundred pink blossoms among the massed thickets; I looked up into the tree-tops, where pink mosses spotted the palms; I looked out over the lake, and I saw it in my mind's eye pinker than ever. It was certainly a case of pink-eye.

"I'll go for a stroll, too; it's a free country," I muttered.

After I had strolled in a complete circle I found myself within three feet of a pink shirt-waist.

"I beg your pardon," I said; "I had no inten—"

"I thought you were never coming," she said, amiably.

"How is your finger?" I asked.

She held it up. I took it gingerly; it was smooth and faintly rosy at the tip.

"Does it hurt?" I inquired.

"Dreadfully. Your hands feel so cool—"

After a silence she said, "Thank you, that has cooled the burning."

"I am determined," said I, "to expel the fire from your finger if it takes hours and hours." And I seated myself with that intention.

For a while she talked, making innocent observations concerning the tropical foliage surrounding us. Then silence crept in between us, accentuated by the brooding stillness of the forest.

"I am afraid your hands are growing tired," she said, considerately.

I denied it.

Through the vista of palms we could see the lake, blue as a violet, sparkling with silvery sunshine. In the intense quiet the splash of leaping mullet sounded distinctly.

Once a tall crane stalked into view among the sedges; once an unseen alligator shook the silence with his deep, hollow roaring. Then the stillness of the wilderness grew more intense.

We had been sitting there for a long while without exchanging a word, dreamily watching the ripple of the azure water, when all at once there came a scurrying patter of feet through the forest, and, looking up, I beheld the hound-dog, tail between his legs, bearing down on us at lightning speed. I rose instantly.

"What is the matter with the dog?" cried the pretty stenographer. "Is he going mad, Mr. Gilland?"

"Something has scared him," I exclaimed, as the dog, eyes like lighted candles, rushed frantically between my legs and buried his head in Miss Barrison's lap.

"Poor doggy!" she said, smoothing the collapsed pup; "poor, p-oor little beast! Did anything scare him? Tell aunty all about it."

When a dog flees *without yelping* he's a badly frightened creature. I instinctively started back towards the camp whence the beast had fled, and before I had taken a dozen steps Miss Barrison was beside me, carrying the dog in her arms.

"I've an idea," she said, under her breath.

"What?" I asked, keeping my eyes on the camp.

"It's this: I'll wager that we find those pies gone!"

"Pies gone?" I repeated, perplexed; "what makes you think—"

"They *are* gone!" she exclaimed. "Look!"

I gaped stupidly at the rough pine table where the pies had stood in three neat rows of four each. And then, in a moment, the purport of this robbery flashed upon my senses.

"The transparent creatures!" I gasped.

"Hush!" she whispered, clinging to the trembling dog in her arms.

I listened. I could hear nothing, see nothing, yet slowly I became convinced of the presence of something unseen—something in the forest close by, watching us out of invisible eyes.

A chill, settling along my spine, crept upward to my scalp, until every separate hair wiggled to the roots. Miss Barrison was pale, but perfectly calm and self-possessed.

"Let us go in-doors," I said, as steadily as I could.

"Very well," she replied.

I held the door open; she entered with the dog; I followed, closing and barring the door, and then took my station at the window, rifle in hand.

There was not a sound in the forest. Miss Barrison laid the dog on the floor and quietly picked up her pad and pencil. Presently she was deep in a report of the phenomena, her pencil flying, leaf after leaf from the pad fluttering to the floor.

Nor did I at the window change my position of scared alertness, until I was aware of her hand gently touching my elbow to attract my attention, and her soft voice at my ear—

"You don't suppose by any chance that the dog ate those pies?"

I collected my tumultuous thoughts and turned to stare at the dog.

"Twelve pies, twelve inches each in diameter," she reflected, musingly. "One dog, twenty inches in diameter. How many times will the pies go into the dog? Let me see." She made a few figures on her pad, thought awhile, produced a tape-measure from her pocket, and, kneeling down, measured the dog.

"No," she said, looking up at me, "he couldn't contain them."

Inspired by her coolness and perfect composure, I set the rifle in the corner and opened the door. Sunlight fell in bars through the

quiet woods; nothing stirred on land or water save the great, yellow-striped butterflies that fluttered and soared and floated above the flowering thickets bordering the jungle.

The heat became intense; Miss Barrison went to her room to change her gown for a lighter one; I sat down under a live-oak, eyes and ears strained for any sign of our invisible neighbors.

When she emerged in the lightest and filmiest of summer gowns, she brought the camera with her; and for a while we took pictures of each other, until we had used up all but one film.

Desiring to possess a picture of Miss Barrison and myself seated together, I tied a string to the shutter-lever and attached the other end of the string to the dog, who had resumed his interrupted slumbers. At my whistle he jumped up nervously, snapping the lever, and the picture was taken.

With such innocent and harmless pastime we whiled away the afternoon. She made twelve more apple-pies. I mounted guard over them. And we were just beginning to feel a trifle uneasy about Professor Farrago, when he appeared, tramping sturdily through the forest, green umbrella and butterfly-net under one arm, shot-gun and cyanide-jar under the other, and his breast all criss-crossed with straps, from which dangled field-glasses, collecting-boxes, and botanizing-tins—an inspiring figure indeed—the embodied symbol of science indomitable, triumphant!

We hailed him with three guilty cheers; the dog woke up with a perfunctory bark—the first sound I had heard from him since he yelped his disapproval of me on the lagoon.

Miss Barrison produced three bowls full of boiling water and dropped three pellets of concentrated soup-meat into them, while I prepared coffee. And in a few moments our simple dinner was ready—the red ants had been dusted from the biscuits, the spiders chased off the baked beans, the scorpions shaken from the napkins, and we sat down at the rough, improvised table under the palms.

The professor gave us a brief but modest account of his short tour of exploration. He had brought back a new species of orchid, several undescribed beetles, and a pocketful of coontie seed. He appeared, however, to be tired and singularly depressed, and presently we learned why.

It seemed that he had gone straight to that section of the forest where he had hitherto always found signs of the transparent and invisible creatures which he had determined to capture, and he had not found a single trace of them.

"It alarms me," he said, gravely. "If they have deserted this region, it might take a lifetime to locate them again in this wilderness."

Then, very quietly, sinking her voice instinctively, as though the unseen might be at our very elbows listening, Miss Barrison recounted the curious adventure which had befallen the dog and the first batch of apple-pies.

With visible and increasing excitement the professor listened until the very end. Then he struck the table with clinched fist—a resounding blow which set the concentrated soup dancing in the bowls and scattered the biscuits and the industrious red ants in every direction.

"Eureka!" he whispered. "Miss Barrison, your deduction was not only perfectly reasonable, but brilliant. You are right; the pies are for that very purpose. I conceived the idea when I first came here. Again and again the pies that my guide made out of dried apples disappeared in a most astonishing and mysterious manner when left to cool. At length I determined to watch them every second; and did so, with the result that late one afternoon I was amazed to see a pie slowly rise from the table and move swiftly away through the air about four feet above the ground, finally disappearing into a tangle of jasmine and grape-vine.

"The apparently automatic flight of that pie solved the problem; these transparent creatures cannot resist that delicacy. Therefore I decided to bait the cage for them this very night—Look! What's the matter with that dog?"

The dog suddenly bounded into the air, alighted on all fours, ears, eyes, and muzzle concentrated on a point directly behind us.

"Good gracious! The pies!" faltered Miss Barrison, half rising from her seat; but the dog rushed madly into her skirts, scrambling for protection, and she fell back almost into my arms.

Clasping her tightly, I looked over my shoulder; the last pie was snatched from the table before my eyes and I saw it borne swiftly

away by something unseen, straight into the deepening shadows of the forest.

The professor was singularly calm, even slightly ironical, as he turned to me, saying:

"Perhaps if you relinquish Miss Barrison she may be able to free herself from that dog."

I did so immediately, and she deposited the cowering dog in my arms. Her face had suddenly become pink.

I passed the dog on to Professor Farrago, dumping it viciously into his lap—a proceeding which struck me as resembling a pastime of extreme youth known as "button, button, who's got the button?"

The professor examined the animal gravely, feeling its pulse, counting its respirations, and finally inserting a tentative finger in an attempt to examine its tongue. The dog bit him.

"Ouch! It's a clear case of fright," he said, gravely. "I wanted a dog to aid me in trailing these remarkable creatures, but I think this dog of yours is useless, Gilland."

"It's given us warning of the creatures' presence twice already," I argued.

"Poor little thing," said Miss Barrison, softly; "I don't know why, but I love that dog… . He has eyes like yours, Mr. Gilland—"

Exasperated, I rose from the table. "He's got eyes like holes burned in a blanket!" I said. "And if ever a flicker of intelligence lighted them I have failed to observe it."

The professor regarded me dreamily. "We ought to have more pies," he observed. "Perhaps if you carried the oven into the shanty —"

"Certainly," said Miss Barrison; "we can lock the door while I make twelve more pies."

I carried the portable camping-oven into the cabin, connected the patent asbestos chimney-pipes, and lighted the fire. And in a few minutes Miss Barrison, sleeves rolled up and pink apron pinned under her chin, was busily engaged in rolling pie-crust, while Professor Farrago measured out spices and set the dried apples to soak.

The swift Southern twilight had already veiled the forest as I stepped out of the cabin to smoke a cigar and promenade a bit and

cogitate. A last trace of color lingering in the west faded out as I looked; the gray glimmer deepened into darkness, through which the white lake vapors floated in thin, wavering strata across the water.

For a while the frog's symphony dominated all other sounds, then lagoon and forest and cypress branch awoke; and through the steadily sustained tumult of woodland voices I could hear the dry bark of the fox-squirrel, the whistle of the raccoon, ducks softly quacking or whimpering as they prepared for sleep among the reeds, the soft booming of bitterns, the clattering gossip of the heronry, the Southern whippoorwill's incessant call.

At regular intervals the howling note of a lone heron echoed the strident screech of a crimson-crested crane; the horned owl's savage hunting-cry haunted the night, now near, now floating from infinite distances.

And after a while I became aware of a nearer sound, low-pitched but ceaseless—the hum of thousands of lesser living creatures blending to a steady monotone.

Then the theatrical moon came up through filmy draperies of waving Spanish moss thin as cobwebs; and far in the wilderness a cougar fell a-crying and coughing like a little child with a bad cold.

I went in after that. Miss Barrison was sitting before the oven, knees gathered in her clasped hands, languidly studying the fire. She looked up as I appeared, opened the oven-doors, sniffed the aroma, and resumed her attitude of contented indifference.

"Where is the professor?" I asked.

"He has retired. He's been talking in his sleep at moments."

"Better take it down; that's what you're here for," I observed, closing and holding the outside door. "Ugh! there's a chill in the air. The dew is pelting down from the pines like a steady fall of rain."

"You will get fever if you roam about at night," she said. "Mercy! your coat is soaking. Sit here by the fire."

So I pulled up a bench and sat down beside her like the traditional spider.

"Miss Muffitt," I said, "don't let me frighten you away—"

"I was going anyhow—"

"Please don't."

"Why?" she demanded, reseating herself.

"Because I like to sit beside you," I said, truthfully.

"Your avowal is startling and not to be substantiated by facts," she remarked, resting her chin on one hand and gazing into the fire.

"You mean because I went for a stroll by moonlight? I did that because you always seem to make fun of me as soon as the professor joins us."

"Make fun of you? You surely don't expect me to make eyes at you!"

There was a silence; I toasted my shins, thoughtfully.

"How is your burned finger?" I asked.

She lifted it for my inspection, and I began a protracted examination.

"What would you prescribe?" she inquired, with an absent-minded glance at the professor's closed door.

"I don't know; perhaps a slight but firm pressure of the finger-tips —"

"You tried that this afternoon."

"But the dog interrupted us—"

"Interrupted *you*. Besides—"

"What?"

"I don't think you ought to," she said.

Sitting there before the oven, side by side, hand innocently clasped in hand, we heard the drumming of the dew on the roof, the night-wind stirring the palms, the muffled snoring of the professor, the faint whisper and crackle of the fire.

A single candle burned brightly, piling our shadows together on the wall behind us; moonlight silvered the window-panes, over which crawled multitudes of soft-winged moths, attracted by the candle within.

"See their tiny eyes glow!" she whispered. "How their wings quiver! And all for a candle-flame! Alas! alas! fire is the undoing of us all."

She leaned forward, resting as though buried in reverie. After a while she extended one foot a trifle and, with the point of her shoe, carefully unlatched the oven-door. As it swung outward a delicious fragrance filled the room.

"They're done," she said, withdrawing her hand from mine. "Help me to lift them out."

Together we arranged the delicious pastry in rows on the bench to cool. I opened the door for a few minutes, then closed and bolted it again.

"Do you suppose those transparent creatures will smell the odor and come around the cabin?" she suggested, wiping her fingers on her handkerchief.

I walked to the window uneasily. Outside the pane the moths crawled, some brilliant in scarlet and tan-color set with black, some snow-white with black tracings on their wings, and bodies peacock-blue edged with orange. The scientist in me was aroused; I called her to the window, and she came and leaned against the sill, nose pressed to the glass.

"I don't suppose you know that the antennæ of that silvery-winged moth are distinctly pectinate," I said.

"Of course I do," she said. "I took my degree as D.E. at Barnard College."

"What!" I exclaimed in astonishment. "You've been through Barnard? You are a Doctor of Entomology?"

"It was my undoing," she said. "The department was abolished the year I graduated. There was no similar vacancy, even in the Smithsonian."

She shrugged her shoulders, eyes fixed on the moths. "I had to make my own living. I chose stenography as the quickest road to self-sustenance."

She looked up, a flush on her cheeks.

"I suppose you took me for an inferior?" she said. "But do you suppose I'd flirt with you if I was?"

She pressed her face to the pane again, murmuring that exquisite poem of Andrew Lang:

"Spooning is innocuous and needn't have a sequel, But recollect, if spoon you must, spoon only with your equal."

Standing there, watching the moths, we became rather silent—I don't know why.

The fire in the range had gone out; the candle-flame, flaring above a saucer of melted wax, sank lower and lower.

Suddenly, as though disturbed by something inside, the moths all left the window-pane, darting off in the darkness.

"That's curious," I said.

"What's curious?" she asked, opening her eyes languidly. "Good gracious! Was that a bat that beat on the window?"

"I saw nothing," I said, disturbed. "Listen!"

A soft sound against the glass, as though invisible fingers were feeling the pane—a gentle rubbing—then a tap-tap, all but inaudible.

"Is it a bird? Can you see?" she whispered.

The candle-flame behind us flashed and expired. Moonlight flooded the pane. The sounds continued, but there was nothing there.

We understood now what it was that so gently rubbed and patted the glass outside. With one accord we noiselessly gathered up the pies and carried them into my room.

Then she walked to the door of her room, turned, held out her hand, and whispering, "Good-night! A demain, monsieur!" slipped into her room and softly closed the door.

And all night long I lay in troubled slumber beside the pies, a rifle resting on the blankets beside me, a revolver under my pillow. And I dreamed of moths with brilliant eyes and vast silvery wings harnessed to a balloon in which Miss Barrison and I sat, arms around each other, eating slice after slice of apple-pie.

Chapter 17

Dawn came—the dawn of a day that I am destined never to forget. Long, rosy streamers of light broke through the forest, shaking, quivering, like unstable beams from celestial search-lights. Mist floated upward from marsh and lake; and through it the spectral palms loomed, drooping fronds embroidered with dew.

For a while the ringing outburst of bird music dominated all; but it soon ceased with dropping notes from the crimson cardinals repeated in lengthening minor intervals; and then the spell of silence returned, broken only by the faint splash of mullet, mocking the sun with sinuous, silver flashes.

"Good-morning," said a low voice from the door as I stood encouraging the camp-fire with splinter wood and dead palmetto fans.

Fresh and sweet from her toilet as a dew-drenched rose, Miss Barrison stood there sniffing the morning air daintily, thoroughly.

"Too much perfume," she said—"too much like ylang-ylang in a department-store. Central Park smells sweeter on an April morning."

"Are you criticising the wild jasmine?" I asked.

"I'm criticising an exotic smell. Am I not permitted to comment on the tropics?"

Fishing out a cedar log from the lumber-stack, I fell to chopping it vigorously. The axe-strokes made a cheerful racket through the woods.

"Did you hear anything last night after you retired?" I asked.

"Something was at my window—something that thumped softly and seemed to be feeling all over the glass. To tell you the truth, I

was silly enough to remain dressed all night."

"You don't look it," I said.

"Oh, when daylight came I had a chance," she added, laughing.

"All the same," said I, leaning on the axe and watching her, "you are about the coolest and pluckiest woman I ever knew."

"We were all in the same fix," she said, modestly.

"No, we were not. Now I'll tell you the truth—my hair stood up the greater part of the night. You are looking upon a poltroon, Miss Barrison."

"Then there was something at your window, too?"

"Something? A dozen! They were monkeying with the sashes and panes all night long, and I imagined that I could hear them breathing—as though from effort of intense eagerness. Ouch! I came as near losing my nerve as I care to. I came within an ace of hurling those cursed pies through the window at them. I'd bolt to-day if I wasn't afraid to play the coward."

"Most people are brave for that reason," she said.

The dog, who had slept under my bunk, and who had contributed to my entertainment by sighing and moaning all night, now appeared ready for business—business in his case being the operation of feeding. I presented him with a concentrated tablet, which he cautiously investigated and then rolled on.

"Nice testimonial for the people who concocted it," I said, in disgust. "I wish I had an egg."

"There are some concentrated egg tablets in the shanty," said Miss Barrison; but the idea was not attractive.

"I refuse to fry a pill for breakfast," I said, sullenly, and set the coffee-pot on the coals.

In spite of the dewy beauty of the morning, breakfast was not a cheerful function. Professor Farrago appeared, clad in sun-helmet and khaki. I had seldom seen him depressed; but he was now, and his very efforts to disguise it only emphasized his visible anxiety.

His preparations for the day, too, had an ominous aspect to me. He gave his orders and we obeyed, instinctively suppressing questions. First, he and I transported all personal luggage of the company to the big electric launch—Miss Barrison's effects, his, and

my own. His private papers, the stenographic reports, and all memoranda were tied up together and carried aboard.

Then, to my surprise, two weeks' concentrated rations for two and mineral water sufficient for the same period were stowed away aboard the launch. Several times he asked me whether I knew how to run the boat, and I assured him that I did.

In a short time nothing was left ashore except the bare furnishings of the cabin, the female wearing-apparel, the steel cage and chemicals which I had brought, and the twelve apple-pies—the latter under lock and key in my room.

As the preparations came to an end, the professor's gentle melancholy seemed to deepen. Once I ventured to ask him if he was indisposed, and he replied that he had never felt in better physical condition.

Presently he bade me fetch the pies; and I brought them, and, at a sign from him, placed them inside the steel cage, closing and locking the door.

"I believe," he said, glancing from Miss Barrison to me, and from me to the dog—"I believe that we are ready to start."

He went to the cabin and locked the door on the outside, pocketing the key.

Then he backed up to the steel cage, stooped and lifted his end as I lifted mine, and together we started off through the forest, bearing the cage between us as porters carry a heavy piece of luggage.

Miss Barrison came next, carrying the trousseau, the tank, hose, and chemicals; and the dog followed her—probably not from affection for us, but because he was afraid to be left alone.

We walked in silence, the professor and I keeping an instinctive lookout for snakes; but we encountered nothing of that sort. On every side, touching our shoulders, crowded the closely woven and impenetrable tangle of the jungle; and we threaded it along a narrow path which he, no doubt, had cut, for the machete marks were still fresh, and the blazes on hickory, live-oak, and palm were all wet with dripping sap, and swarming with eager, brilliant butterflies.

At times across our course flowed shallow, rapid streams of water, clear as crystal, and most alluring to the thirsty.

"There's fever in every drop," said the professor, as I mentioned my thirst; "take the bottled water if you mean to stay a little longer."

"Stay where?" I asked.

"On earth," he replied, tersely; and we marched on.

The beauty of the tropics is marred somewhat for me; under all the fresh splendor of color death lurks in brilliant tints. Where painted fruit hangs temptingly, where great, silky blossoms exhale alluring scent, where the elaps coils inlaid with scarlet, black, and saffron, where in the shadow of a palmetto frond a succession of velvety black diamonds mark the rattler's swollen length, there death is; and his invisible consort, horror, creeps where the snake whose mouth is lined with white creeps—where the tarantula squats, hairy, motionless; where a bit of living enamel fringed with orange undulates along a mossy log.

Thinking of these things, and watchful lest, unawares, terror unfold from some blossoming and leafy covert, I scarcely noticed the beauty of the glade we had entered—a long oval, cross-barred with sunshine which fell on hedges of scrub-palmetto, chin high, interlaced with golden blossoms of the jasmine. And all around, like pillars supporting a high green canopy above a throne, towered the silvery stems of palms fretted with pale, rose-tinted lichens and hung with draperies of grape-vine.

"This is the place," said Professor Farrago.

His quiet, passionless voice sounded strange to me; his words seemed strange, too, each one heavily weighted with hidden meaning.

We set the cage on the ground; he unlocked and opened the steel-barred door, and, kneeling, carefully arranged the pies along the centre of the cage.

"I have a curious presentiment," he said, "that I shall not come out of this experiment unscathed."

"Don't, for Heaven's sake, say that!" I broke out, my nerves on edge again.

"Why not?" he asked, surprised. "I am not afraid."

"Not afraid to die?" I demanded, exasperated.

"Who spoke of dying?" he inquired, mildly. "What I said was that I do not expect to come out of this affair unscathed."

I did not comprehend his meaning, but I understood the reproof conveyed.

He closed and locked the cage door again and came towards us, balancing the key across the palm of his hand.

Miss Barrison had seated herself on the leaves; I stood back as the professor sat down beside her; then, at a gesture from him, took the place he indicated on his left.

"Before we begin," he said, calmly, "there are several things you ought to know and which I have not yet told you. The first concerns the feminine wearing apparel which Mr. Gilland brought me."

He turned to Miss Barrison and asked her whether she had brought a complete outfit, and she opened the bundle on her knees and handed it to him.

"I cannot," he said, "delicately explain in so many words what use I expect to make of this apparel. Nor do I yet know whether I shall have any use at all for it. That can only be a theoretical speculation until, within a few more hours, my theory is proven or disproven—and," he said, suddenly turning on me, "my theory concerning these invisible creatures is the most extraordinary and audacious theory ever entertained by man since Columbus presumed that there must lie somewhere a hidden continent which nobody had ever seen."

He passed his hand over his protruding forehead, lost for a moment in deepest reflection. Then, "Have you ever heard of the Sphyx?" he asked.

"It seems to me that Ponce de Leon wrote of something—" I began, hesitating.

"Yes, the famous lines in the third volume which have set so many wise men guessing. You recall them:

"'*And there, alas! within sound of the Fountain of Youth whose waters tint the skin till the whole body glows softly like the petal of a rose—there, alas! in the new world already blooming*, THE ETERNAL ENIGMA *I beheld, in the flesh living; yet it faded even as I looked, although I swear it lived and breathed. This is the Sphyx*.'"

A silence; then I said, "Those lines are meaningless to me."

"Not to me," said Miss Barrison, softly.

The professor looked at her. "Ah, child! Ever subtler, ever surer—the Eternal Enigma is no enigma to you."

"What is the Sphyx?" I asked.

"Have you read De Soto? Or Goya?"

"Yes, both. I remember now that De Soto records the Syachas legend of the Sphyx—something about a goddess—"

"Not a goddess," said Miss Barrison, her lips touched with a smile.

"Sometimes," said the professor, gently. "And Goya said:

"'*It has come to my ears while in the lands of the Syachas that the Sphyx surely lives, as bolder and more curious men than I may, God willing, prove to the world hereafter*.'"

"But what is the Sphyx?" I insisted.

"For centuries wise men and savants have asked each other that question. I have answered it for myself; I am now to prove it, I trust."

His face darkened, and again and again he stroked his heavy brow.

"If anything occurs," he said, taking my hand in his left and Miss Barrison's hand in his right, "promise me to obey my wishes. Will you?"

"Yes," we said, together.

"If I lose my life, or—or disappear, promise me on your honor to get to the electric launch as soon as possible and make all speed northward, placing my private papers, the reports of Miss Barrison, and your own reports in the hands of the authorities in Bronx Park. Don't attempt to aid me; don't delay to search for me. Do you promise?"

"Yes," we breathed together.

He looked at us solemnly. "If you fail me, you betray me," he said.

We swore obedience.

"Then let us begin," he said, and he rose and went to the steel cage. Unlocking the door, he flung it wide and stepped inside, leaving the cage door open.

"The moment a single pie is disturbed," he said to me, "I shall close the steel door from the inside, and you and Miss Barrison will then dump the rosium oxide and the strontium into the tank, clap on the lid, turn the nozzle of the hose on the cage, and spray it thoroughly. Whatever is invisible in the cage will become visible and of a faint rose color. And when the trapped creature becomes visible, hold yourselves ready to aid me as long as I am able to give you

orders. After that either all will go well or all will go otherwise, and you must run for the launch." He seated himself in the cage near the open door.

I placed the steel tank near the cage, uncoiled the hose attachment, unscrewed the top, and dumped in the salts of strontium. Miss Barrison unwrapped the bottle of rosium oxide and loosened the cork. We examined this pearl-and-pink powder and shook it up so that it might run out quickly. Then Miss Barrison sat down, and presently became absorbed in a stenographic report of the proceedings up to date.

When Miss Barrison finished her report she handed me the bundle of papers. I stowed them away in my wallet, and we sat down together beside the tank.

Inside the cage Professor Farrago was seated, his spectacled eyes fixed on the row of pies. For a while, although realizing perfectly that our quarry was transparent and invisible, we unconsciously strained our eyes in quest of something stirring in the forest.

"I should think," said I, in a low voice, "that the odor of the pies might draw at least one out of the odd dozen that came rubbing up against my window last night."

"Hush! Listen!" she breathed. But we heard nothing save the snoring of the overfed dog at our feet.

"He'll give us ample notice by butting into Miss Barrison's skirts," I observed. "No need of our watching, professor."

The professor nodded. Presently he removed his spectacles and lay back against the bars, closing his eyes.

At first the forest silence seemed cheerful there in the flecked sunlight. The spotted wood-gnats gyrated merrily, chased by dragon-flies; the shy wood-birds hopped from branch to twig, peering at us in friendly inquiry; a lithe, gray squirrel, plumy tail undulating, rambled serenely around the cage, sniffing at the pastry within.

Suddenly, without apparent reason, the squirrel sprang to a tree-trunk, hung a moment on the bark, quivering all over, then dashed away into the jungle.

"Why did he act like that?" whispered Miss Barrison. And, after a moment: "How still it is! Where have the birds gone?"

In the ominous silence the dog began to whimper in his sleep and his hind legs kicked convulsively.

"He's dreaming—" I began.

The words were almost driven down my throat by the dog, who, without a yelp of warning, hurled himself at Miss Barrison and alighted on my chest, fore paws around my neck.

I cast him scornfully from me, but he scrambled back, digging like a mole to get under us.

"The transparent creatures!" whispered Miss Barrison. "Look! See that pie move!"

I sprang to my feet just as the professor, jamming on his spectacles, leaned forward and slammed the cage door.

"I've got one!" he shouted, frantically. "There's one in the cage! Turn on that hose!"

"Wait a second," said Miss Barrison, calmly, uncorking the bottle and pouring a pearly stream of rosium oxide into the tank. "Quick! It's fizzing! Screw on the top!"

In a second I had screwed the top fast, seized the hose, and directed a hissing cloud of vapor through the cage bars.

For a moment nothing was heard save the whistling rush of the perfumed spray escaping; a delicious odor of roses filled the air. Then, slowly, there in the sunshine, a misty something grew in the cage—a glistening, pearl-tinted phantom, imperceptibly taking shape in space—vague at first as a shred of lake vapor, then lengthening, rounding into flowing form, clearer, clearer.

"The Sphyx!" gasped the professor. "In the name of Heaven, play that hose!"

As he spoke the treacherous hose burst. A showery pillar of rose-colored vapor enveloped everything. Through the thickening fog for one brief instant a human form appeared like magic—a woman's form, flawless, exquisite as a statue, pure as marble. Then the swimming vapor buried it, cage, pies, and all.

We ran frantically around, the cage in the obscurity, appealing for instructions and feeling for the bars. Once the professor's muffled voice was heard demanding the wearing apparel, and I groped about and found it and stuffed it through the bars of the cage.

"Do you need help?" I shouted. There was no response. Staring around through the thickening vapor of rosium rolling in clouds from the overturned tank, I heard Miss Barrison's voice calling:

"I can't move! A transparent lady is holding me!"

Blindly I rushed about, arms outstretched, and the next moment struck the door of the cage so hard that the impact almost knocked me senseless. Clutching it to steady myself, it suddenly flew open. A rush of partly visible creatures passed me like a burst of pink flames, and in the midst, borne swiftly away on the crest of the outrush, the professor passed like a bolt shot from a catapult; and his last cry came wafted back to me from the forest as I swayed there, drunk with the stupefying perfume: "Don't worry! I'm all right!"

I staggered out into the clearer air towards a figure seen dimly through swirling vapor.

"Are you hurt?" I stammered, clasping Miss Barrison in my arms.

"No—oh no," she said, wringing her hands. "But the professor! I saw him! I could not scream; I could not move! *They* had him!"

"I saw him too," I groaned. "There was not one trace of terror on his face. He was actually smiling."

Overcome at the sublime courage of the man, we wept in each other's arms.

True to our promise to Professor Farrago, we made the best of our way northward; and it was not a difficult journey by any means, the voyage in the launch across Okeechobee being perfectly simple and the trail to the nearest railroad station but a few easy miles from the landing-place.

Shocking as had been our experience, dreadful as was the calamity which had not only robbed me of a life-long friend, but had also bereaved the entire scientific world, I could not seem to feel that desperate and hopeless grief which the natural decease of a close friend might warrant. No; there remained a vague expectancy which so dominated my sorrow that at moments I became hopeful—nay, sanguine, that I should one day again behold my beloved superior in the flesh. There was something so happy in his last smile, something so artlessly pleased, that I was certain no fear of impending

dissolution worried him as he disappeared into the uncharted depth of the unknown Everglades.

I think Miss Barrison agreed with me, too. She appeared to be more or less dazed, which was, of course, quite natural; and during our return voyage across Okeechobee and through the lagoons and forests beyond she was very silent.

When we reached the railroad at Portulacca, a thrifty lemon-growing ranch on the Volusia and Chinkapin Railway, the first thing I did was to present my dog to the station-agent—but I was obliged to give him five dollars before he consented to accept the dog.

However, Miss Barrison interviewed the station-master's wife, a kindly, pitiful soul, who promised to be a good mistress to the creature. We both felt better after that was off our minds; we felt better still when the north-bound train rolled leisurely into the white glare of Portulacca, and presently rolled out again, quite as leisurely, bound, thank Heaven, for that abused aggregation of sinful boroughs called New York.

Except for one young man whom I encountered in the smoker, we had the train to ourselves, a circumstance which, curiously enough, appeared to increase Miss Barrison's depression, and my own as a natural sequence. The circumstances of the taking off of Professor Farrago appeared to engross her thoughts so completely that it made me uneasy during our trip out from Little Sprite—in fact it was growing plainer to me every hour that in her brief acquaintance with that distinguished scientist she had become personally attached to him to an extent that began to worry me. Her personal indignation at the caged Sphyx flared out at unexpected intervals, and there could be no doubt that her unhappiness and resentment were becoming morbid.

I spent an hour or two in the smoking compartment, tenanted only by a single passenger and myself. He was an agreeable young man, although, in the natural acquaintanceship that we struck up, I regretted to learn that he was a writer of popular fiction, returning from Fort Worth, where he had been for the sole purpose of composing a poem on Florida.

I have always, in common with other mentally balanced savants, despised writers of fiction. All scientists harbor a natural antipathy to

romance in any form, and that antipathy becomes a deep horror if fiction dares to deal flippantly with the exact sciences, or if some degraded intellect assumes the warrantless liberty of using natural history as the vehicle for silly tales.

Never but once had I been tempted to romance in any form; never but once had sentiment interfered with a passionless transfer of scientific notes to the sanctuary of the unvarnished note-book or the cloister of the juiceless monograph. Nor have I the slightest approach to that superficial and doubtful quality known as literary skill. Once, however, as I sat alone in the middle of the floor, classifying my isopods, I was not only astonished but totally unprepared to find myself repeating aloud a verse that I myself had unconsciously fashioned:

"An isopod Is a work of God."

Never before in all my life had I made a rhyme; and it worried me for weeks, ringing in my brain day and night, confusing me, interfering with my thoughts.

I said as much to the young man, who only laughed good-naturedly and replied that it was the Creator's purpose to limit certain intellects, nobody knows why, and that it was apparent that mine had not escaped.

"There's one thing, however," he said, "that might be of some interest to you and come within the circumscribed scope of your intelligence."

"And what is that?" I asked, tartly.

"A scientific experience of mine," he said, with a careless laugh. "It's so much stranger than fiction that even Professor Bruce Stoddard, of Columbia, hesitated to credit it."

I looked at the young fellow suspiciously. His bland smile disarmed me, but I did not invite him to relate his experience, although he apparently needed only that encouragement to begin.

"Now, if I could tell it exactly as it occurred," he observed, "and a stenographer could take it down, word for word, exactly as I relate it —"

"It would give me great pleasure to do so," said a quiet voice at the door. We rose at once, removing the cigars from our lips; but Miss

Barrison bade us continue smoking, and at a gesture from her we resumed our seats after she had installed herself by the window.

"Really," she said, looking coldly at me, "I couldn't endure the solitude any longer. Isn't there anything to do on this tiresome train?"

"If you had your pad and pencil," I began, maliciously, "you might take down a matter of interest—"

She looked frankly at the young man, who laughed in that pleasant, good-tempered manner of his, and offered to tell us of his alleged scientific experience if we thought it might amuse us sufficiently to vary the dull monotony of the journey north.

"Is it fiction?" I asked, point-blank.

"It is absolute truth," he replied.

I rose and went off to find pad and pencil. When I returned Miss Barrison was laughing at a story which the young man had just finished.

"But," he ended, gravely, "I have practically decided to renounce fiction as a means of livelihood and confine myself to simple, uninteresting statistics and facts."

"I am very glad to hear you say that," I exclaimed, warmly. He bowed, looked at Miss Barrison, and asked her when he might begin his story.

"Whenever you are ready," replied Miss Barrison, smiling in a manner which I had not observed since the disappearance of Professor Farrago. I'll admit that the young fellow was superficially attractive.

"Well, then," he began, modestly, "having no technical ability concerning the affair in question, and having no knowledge of either comparative anatomy or zoology, I am perhaps unfitted to tell this story. But the story is true; the episode occurred under my own eyes —within a few hours' sail of the Battery. And as I was one of the first persons to verify what has long been a theory among scientists, and, moreover, as the result of Professor Holroyd's discovery is to be placed on exhibition in Madison Square Garden on the 20th of next month, I have decided to tell you, as simply as I am able, exactly what occurred.

"I first told the story on April 1, 1903, to the editors of the *North American Review*, *The Popular Science Monthly*, the *Scientific*

American, *Nature*, *Outing*, and the *Fossiliferous Magazine*. All these gentlemen rejected it; some curtly informing me that fiction had no place in their columns. When I attempted to explain that it was not fiction, the editors of these periodicals either maintained a contemptuous silence, or bluntly notified me that my literary services and opinions were not desired. But finally, when several publishers offered to take the story as fiction, I cut short all negotiations and decided to publish it myself. Where I am known at all, it is my misfortune to be known as a writer of fiction. This makes it impossible for me to receive a hearing from a scientific audience. I regret it bitterly, because now, when it is too late, I am prepared to prove certain scientific matters of interest, and to produce the proofs. In this case, however, I am fortunate, for nobody can dispute the existence of a thing when the bodily proof is exhibited as evidence.

"This is the story; and if I tell it as I write fiction, it is because I do not know how to tell it otherwise.

"I was walking along the beach below Pine Inlet, on the south shore of Long Island. The railroad and telegraph station is at West Oyster Bay. Everybody who has travelled on the Long Island Railroad knows the station, but few, perhaps, know Pine Inlet. Duck-shooters, of course, are familiar with it; but as there are no hotels there, and nothing to see except salt meadow, salt creek, and a strip of dune and sand, the summer-squatting public may probably be unaware of its existence. The local name for the place is Pine Inlet; the maps give its name as Sand Point, I believe, but anybody at West Oyster Bay can direct you to it. Captain McPeek, who keeps the West Oyster Bay House, drives duck-shooters there in winter. It lies five miles southeast from West Oyster Bay.

"I had walked over that afternoon from Captain McPeek's. There was a reason for my going to Pine Inlet—it embarrasses me to explain it, but the truth is I meditated writing an ode to the ocean. It was out of the question to write it in West Oyster Bay, with the whistle of locomotives in my ears. I knew that Pine Inlet was one of the loneliest places on the Atlantic coast; it is out of sight of everything except leagues of gray ocean. Rarely one might make out fishing-smacks drifting across the horizon. Summer squatters never visited it; sportsmen shunned it, except in winter. Therefore, as I was

about to do a bit of poetry, I thought that Pine Inlet was the spot for the deed. So I went there.

"As I was strolling along the beach, biting my pencil reflectively, tremendously impressed by the solitude and the solemn thunder of the surf, a thought occurred to me—how unpleasant it would be if I suddenly stumbled on a summer boarder. As this joyless impossibility flitted across my mind, I rounded a bleak sand-dune.

"A girl stood directly in my path.

"She stared at me as though I had just crawled up out of the sea to bite her. I don't know what my own expression resembled, but I have been given to understand it was idiotic.

"Now I perceived, after a few moments, that the young lady was frightened, and I knew I ought to say something civil. So I said, 'Are there many mosquitoes here?'

"'No,' she replied, with a slight quiver in her voice; 'I have only seen one, and it was biting somebody else.'

"The conversation seemed so futile, and the young lady appeared to be more nervous than before. I had an impulse to say, 'Do not run; I have breakfasted,' for she seemed to be meditating a flight into the breakers. What I did say was: 'I did not know anybody was here. I do not intend to intrude. I come from Captain McPeek's, and I am writing an ode to the ocean.' After I had said this it seemed to ring in my ears like, 'I come from Table Mountain, and my name is Truthful James.'

"I glanced timidly at her.

"'She's thinking of the same thing,' said I to myself.

"However, the young lady seemed to be a trifle reassured. I noticed she drew a sigh of relief and looked at my shoes. She looked so long that it made me suspicious, and I also examined my shoes. They seemed to be in a fair state of repair.

"'I—I am sorry,' she said, 'but would you mind not walking on the beach?'

"This was sudden. I had intended to retire and leave the beach to her, but I did not fancy being driven away so abruptly.

"'Dear me!' she cried; 'you don't understand. I do not—I would not think for a moment of asking you to leave Pine Inlet. I merely ventured to request you to walk on the dunes. I am so afraid that

your footprints may obliterate the impressions that my father is studying.'

"'Oh!' said I, looking about me as though I had been caught in the middle of a flower-bed; 'really I did not notice any impressions. Impressions of what?'

"'I don't know,' she said, smiling a little at my awkward pose. 'If you step this way in a straight line you can do no damage.'

"I did as she bade me. I suppose my movements resembled the gait of a wet peacock. Possibly they recalled the delicate manoeuvres of the kangaroo. Anyway, she laughed.

"This seriously annoyed me. I had been at a disadvantage; I walk well enough when let alone.

"'You can scarcely expect,' said I, 'that a man absorbed in his own ideas could notice impressions on the sand. I trust I have obliterated nothing.'

"As I said this I looked back at the long line of footprints stretching away in prospective across the sand. They were my own. How large they looked! Was that what she was laughing at?

"'I wish to explain,' she said, gravely, looking at the point of her parasol. 'I am very sorry to be obliged to warn you—to ask you to forego the pleasure of strolling on a beach that does not belong to me. Perhaps,' she continued, in sudden alarm, 'perhaps this beach belongs to you?'

"'The beach? Oh no,' I said.

"'But—but you were going to write poems about it?'

"'Only one—and that does not necessitate owning the beach. I have observed,' said I, frankly, 'that the people who own nothing write many poems about it.'

"She looked at me seriously.

"'I write many poems,' I added.

"She laughed doubtfully.

"'Would you rather I went away?' I asked, politely. 'My family is respectable,' I added; and I told her my name.

"'Oh! Then you wrote *Culled Cowslips* and *Faded Fig-Leaves* and you imitate Maeterlinck, and you—Oh, I know lots of people that you know;' she cried, with every symptom of relief; 'and you know my brother.'

"'I am the author,' said I, coldly, 'of *Culled Cowslips*, but *Faded Fig-Leaves* was an earlier work, which I no longer recognize, and I should be grateful to you if you would be kind enough to deny that I ever imitated Maeterlinck. Possibly,' I added, 'he imitates me.'

"She was very quiet, and I saw she was sorry.

"'Never mind,' I said, magnanimously, 'you probably are not familiar with modern literature. If I knew your name I should ask permission to present myself.'

"'Why, I am Daisy Holroyd,' she said.

"'What! Jack Holroyd's little sister?'

"'Little?' she cried.

"'I didn't mean that,' said I. 'You know that your brother and I were great friends in Paris—'

"'I know,' she said, significantly.

"'Ahem! Of course,' I said, 'Jack and I were inseparable—'

"'Except when shut in separate cells,' said Miss Holroyd, coldly.

"This unfeeling allusion to the unfortunate termination of a Latin-Quarter celebration hurt me.

"'The police,' said I, 'were too officious.'

"'So Jack says,' replied Miss Holroyd, demurely.

"We had unconsciously moved on along the sand-hills, side by side, as we spoke.

"'To think,' I repeated, 'that I should meet Jack's little—'

"'Please,' she said, 'you are only three years my senior.'

"She opened the sunshade and tipped it over one shoulder. It was white, and had spots and posies on it.

"'Jack sends us every new book you write,' she observed. 'I do not approve of some things you write.'

"'Modern school,' I mumbled.

"'That is no excuse,' she said, severely; 'Anthony Trollope didn't do it.'

"The foam spume from the breakers was drifting across the dunes, and the little tip-up snipe ran along the beach and teetered and whistled and spread their white-barred wings for a low, straight flight across the shingle, only to tip and run and sail on again. The salt sea-wind whistled and curled through the crested waves, blowing in perfumed puffs across thickets of sweet bay and cedar. As we

passed through the crackling juicy-stemmed marsh-weed myriads of fiddler crabs raised their fore-claws in warning and backed away, rustling, through the reeds, aggressive, protesting.

"'Like millions of pygmy Ajaxes defying the lightning,' I said.

"Miss Holroyd laughed.

"'Now I never imagined that authors were clever except in print,' she said.

"She was a most extraordinary girl.

"'I suppose,' she observed, after a moment's silence—'I suppose I am taking you to my father.'

"'Delighted!' I mumbled. 'H'm! I had the honor of meeting Professor Holroyd in Paris.'

"'Yes; he bailed you and Jack out,' said Miss Holroyd, serenely.

"The silence was too painful to last.

"'Captain McPeek is an interesting man,' I said. I spoke more loudly than I intended. I may have been nervous.

"'Yes,' said Daisy Holroyd, 'but he has a most singular hotel clerk.'

"'You mean Mr. Frisby?'

"'I do.'

"'Yes,' I admitted, 'Mr. Frisby is queer. He was once a bill-poster.'

"'I know it!' exclaimed Daisy Holroyd, with some heat. 'He ruins landscapes whenever he has an opportunity. Do you know that he has a passion for bill-posting? He has; he posts bills for the pure pleasure of it, just as you play golf, or tennis, or squash.'

"'But he's a hotel clerk now,' I said; 'nobody employs him to post bills.'

"'I know it! He does it all by himself for the pure pleasure of it. Papa has engaged him to come down here for two weeks, and I dread it,' said the girl.

"What Professor Holroyd might want of Frisby I had not the faintest notion. I suppose Miss Holroyd noticed the bewilderment in my face, for she laughed and nodded her head twice.

"'Not only Mr. Frisby, but Captain McPeek also,' she said.

"'You don't mean to say that Captain McPeek is going to close his hotel!' I exclaimed.

"My trunk was there. It contained guarantees of my respectability.

"'Oh no; his wife will keep it open,' replied the girl. 'Look! you can see papa now. He's digging.'

"'Where?' I blurted out.

"I remembered Professor Holroyd as a prim, spectacled gentleman, with close-cut, snowy beard and a clerical allure. The man I saw digging wore green goggles, a jersey, a battered sou'wester, and hip-boots of rubber. He was delving in the muck of the salt meadow, his face streaming with perspiration, his boots and jersey splashed with unpleasant-looking mud. He glanced up as we approached, shading his eyes with a sunburned hand.

"'Papa, dear,' said Miss Holroyd, 'here is Jack's friend, whom you bailed out of Mazas.'

"The introduction was startling. I turned crimson with mortification. The professor was very decent about it; he called me by name at once. Then he looked at his spade. It was clear he considered me a nuisance and wished to go on with his digging.

"'I suppose,' he said, 'you are still writing?'

"'A little,' I replied, trying not to speak sarcastically. My output had rivalled that of 'The Duchess'—in quantity, I mean.

"'I seldom read—fiction,' he said, looking restlessly at the hole in the ground.

"Miss Holroyd came to my rescue.

"'That was a charming story you wrote last,' she said. 'Papa should read it—you should, papa; it's all about a fossil.'

"We both looked narrowly at Miss Holroyd. Her smile was guileless.

"'Fossils!' repeated the professor. 'Do you care for fossils?'

"'Very much,' said I.

"Now I am not perfectly sure what my object was in lying. I looked at Daisy Holroyd's dark-fringed eyes. They were very grave.

"'Fossils,' said I, 'are my hobby.'

"I think Miss Holroyd winced a little at this. I did not care. I went on:

"'I have seldom had the opportunity to study the subject, but, as a boy, I collected flint arrow-heads—"

"'Flint arrow-heads!' said the professor coldly.

"'Yes; they were the nearest things to fossils obtainable,' I replied, marvelling at my own mendacity.

"The professor looked into the hole. I also looked. I could see nothing in it. 'He's digging for fossils,' thought I to myself.

"'Perhaps,' said the professor, cautiously, 'you might wish to aid me in a little research—that is to say, if you have an inclination for fossils.' The double-entendre was not lost upon me.

"'I have read all your books so eagerly,' said I, 'that to join you, to be of service to you in any research, however difficult and trying, would be an honor and a privilege that I never dared to hope for.'

"'That,' thought I to myself, 'will do its own work.'

"But the professor was still suspicious. How could he help it, when he remembered Jack's escapades, in which my name was always blended! Doubtless he was satisfied that my influence on Jack was evil. The contrary was the case, too.

"'Fossils,' he said, worrying the edge of the excavation with his spade—'fossils are not things to be lightly considered.'

"'No, indeed!' I protested.

"'Fossils are the most interesting as well as puzzling things in the world,' said he.

"'They are!' I cried, enthusiastically.

"'But I am not looking for fossils,' observed the professor, mildly.

"This was a facer. I looked at Daisy Holroyd. She bit her lip and fixed her eyes on the sea. Her eyes were wonderful eyes.

"'Did you think I was digging for fossils in a salt meadow?' queried the professor. 'You can have read very little about the subject. I am digging for something quite different.'

"I was silent. I knew that my face was flushed. I longed to say, 'Well, what the devil are you digging for?' but I only stared into the hole as though hypnotized.

"'Captain McPeek and Frisby ought to be here,' he said, looking first at Daisy and then across the meadows.

"I ached to ask him why he had subpoenaed Captain McPeek and Frisby.

"'They are coming,' said Daisy, shading her eyes. 'Do you see the speck on the meadows?'

"'It may be a mud-hen,' said the professor.

"'Miss Holroyd is right,' I said. 'A wagon and team and two men are coming from the north. There's a dog beside the wagon—it's that

miserable yellow dog of Frisby's.'

"'Good gracious!' cried the professor, 'you don't mean to tell me that you see all that at such a distance?'

"'Why not?' I said.

"'I see nothing,' he insisted.

"'You will see that I'm right, presently,' I laughed.

"The professor removed his blue goggles and rubbed them, glancing obliquely at me.

"'Haven't you heard what extraordinary eyesight duck-shooters have?' said his daughter, looking back at her father. 'Jack says that he can tell exactly what kind of a duck is flying before most people could see anything at all in the sky.'

"'It's true,' I said; 'it comes to anybody, I fancy, who has had practice.'

"The professor regarded me with a new interest. There was inspiration in his eyes. He turned towards the ocean. For a long time he stared at the tossing waves on the beach, then he looked far out to where the horizon met the sea.

"'Are there any ducks out there?' he asked, at last.

"'Yes,' said I, scanning the sea, 'there are.'

"He produced a pair of binoculars from his coat-tail pocket, adjusted them, and raised them to his eyes.

"'H'm! What sort of ducks?'

"I looked more carefully, holding both hands over my forehead.

"'Surf-ducks and widgeon. There is one bufflehead among them—no, two; the rest are coots,' I replied.

"'This,' cried the professor, 'is most astonishing. I have good eyes, but I can't see a blessed thing without these binoculars!'

"'It's not extraordinary,' said I; 'the surf-ducks and coots any novice might recognize; the widgeon and buffleheads I should not have been able to name unless they had risen from the water. It is easy to tell any duck when it is flying, even though it looks no bigger than a black pin-point.'

"But the professor insisted that it was marvellous, and he said that I might render him invaluable service if I would consent to come and camp at Pine Inlet for a few weeks.

"I looked at his daughter, but she turned her back. Her back was beautifully moulded. Her gown fitted also.

"'Camp out here?' I repeated, pretending to be unpleasantly surprised.

"'I do not think he would care to,' said Miss Holroyd, without turning.

"I had not expected that.

"'Above all things,' said I, in a clear, pleasant voice, 'I like to camp out.'

"She said nothing.

"'It is not exactly camping,' said the professor. 'Come, you shall see our conservatory. Daisy, come, dear! You must put on a heavier frock; it is getting towards sundown.'

"At that moment, over a near dune, two horses' heads appeared, followed by two human heads, then a wagon, then a yellow dog.

"I turned triumphantly to the professor.

"'You are the very man I want,' he muttered—'the very man—the very man.'

"I looked at Daisy Holroyd. She returned my glance with a defiant little smile.

"'Waal,' said Captain McPeek, driving up, 'here we be! Git out, Frisby.'

"Frisby, fat, nervous, and sentimental, hopped out of the cart.

"'Come,' said the professor, impatiently moving across the dunes. I walked with Daisy Holroyd. McPeek and Frisby followed. The yellow dog walked by himself.

Chapter 18

"The sun was dipping into the sea as we trudged across the meadows towards a high, dome-shaped dune covered with cedars and thickets of sweet bay. I saw no sign of habitation among the sand-hills. Far as the eye could reach, nothing broke the gray line of sea and sky save the squat dunes crowned with stunted cedars.

"Then, as we rounded the base of the dune, we almost walked into the door of a house. My amazement amused Miss Holroyd, and I noticed also a touch of malice in her pretty eyes. But she said nothing, following her father into the house, with the slightest possible gesture to me. Was it invitation or was it menace?

"The house was merely a light wooden frame, covered with some waterproof stuff that looked like a mixture of rubber and tar. Over this—in fact, over the whole roof—was pitched an awning of heavy sail-cloth. I noticed that the house was anchored to the sand by chains, already rusted red. But this one-storied house was not the only building nestling in the south shelter of the big dune. A hundred feet away stood another structure—long, low, also built of wood. It had rows on rows of round port-holes on every side. The ports were fitted with heavy glass, hinged to swing open if necessary. A single, big double door occupied the front.

"Behind this long, low building was still another, a mere shed. Smoke rose from the sheet-iron chimney. There was somebody moving about inside the open door.

"As I stood gaping at this mushroom hamlet the professor appeared at the door and asked me to enter. I stepped in at once.

"The house was much larger than I had imagined. A straight hallway ran through the centre from east to west. On either side of this hallway were rooms, the doors swinging wide open. I counted three doors on each side; the three on the south appeared to be bedrooms.

"The professor ushered me into a room on the north side, where I found Captain McPeek and Frisby sitting at a table, upon which were drawings and sketches of articulated animals and fishes.

"'You see, McPeek,' said the professor, 'we only wanted one more man, and I think I've got him—Haven't I?' turning eagerly to me.

"'Why, yes,' I said, laughing; 'this is delightful. Am I invited to stay here?'

"'Your bedroom is the third on the south side; everything is ready. McPeek, you can bring his trunk to-morrow, can't you?' demanded the professor.

"The red-faced captain nodded, and shifted a quid.

"'Then it's all settled,' said the professor, and he drew a sigh of satisfaction. 'You see,' he said, turning to me, 'I was at my wit's end to know whom to trust. I never thought of you. Jack's out in China, and I didn't dare trust anybody in my own profession. All you care about is writing verses and stories, isn't it?'

"'I like to shoot,' I replied, mildly.

"'Just the thing!' he cried, beaming at us all in turn. 'Now I can see no reason why we should not progress rapidly. McPeek, you and Frisby must get those boxes up here before dark. Dinner will be ready before you have finished unloading. Dick, you will wish to go to your room first.'

"My name isn't Dick, but he spoke so kindly, and beamed upon me in such a fatherly manner, that I let it go. I had occasion to correct him afterwards, several times, but he always forgot the next minute. He calls me Dick to this day.

"It was dark when Professor Holroyd, his daughter, and I sat down to dinner. The room was the same in which I had noticed the drawings of beast and bird, but the round table had been extended into an oval, and neatly spread with dainty linen and silver.

"A fresh-cheeked Swedish girl appeared from a farther room, bearing the soup. The professor ladled it out, still beaming.

"'Now, this is very delightful—isn't it, Daisy?' he said.

"'Very,' said Miss Holroyd, with a tinge of irony.

"'Very,' I repeated, heartily.

"'I suppose,' said the professor, nodding mysteriously at his daughter, 'that Dick knows nothing of what we're about down here?'

"'I suppose,' said Miss Holroyd, 'that he thinks we are digging for fossils.'

"I looked at my plate. She might have spared me that.

"'Well, well,' said her father, smiling to himself, 'he shall know everything by morning. You'll be astonished, Dick, my boy.'

"'His name isn't Dick,' corrected Daisy.

"The professor said, 'Isn't it?' in an absent-minded way, and relapsed into contemplation of my necktie.

"I asked Miss Holroyd a few questions about Jack, and was informed that he had given up law and entered the consular service—as what, I did not dare ask, for I know what our consular service is.

"'In China,' said Daisy.

"'Choo Choo is the name of the city,' added her father, proudly; 'it's the terminus of the new trans-Siberian railway.'

"'It's on the Pong Ping,' said Daisy.

"'He's vice-consul,' added the professor, triumphantly.

"'He'll make a good one,' I observed. I knew Jack. I pitied his consul.

"So we chatted on about my old playmate, until Freda, the red-cheeked maid, brought coffee, and the professor lighted a cigar, with a little bow to his daughter.

"'Of course, you don't smoke,' she said to me, with a glimmer of malice in her eyes.

"'He mustn't,' interposed the professor, hastily; 'it will make his hand tremble.'

"'No, it won't,' said I, laughing; 'but my hand will shake if I don't smoke. Are you going to employ me as a draughtsman?'

"'You'll know to-morrow,' he chuckled, with a mysterious smile at his daughter. 'Daisy, give him my best cigars—put the box here on the table. We can't afford to have his hand tremble.'

"Miss Holroyd rose and crossed the hallway to her father's room, returning presently with a box of promising-looking cigars.

"'I don't think he knows what is good for him,' she said. 'He should smoke only one every day.'

"It was hard to bear. I am not vindictive, but I decided to treasure up a few of Miss Holroyd's gentle taunts. My intimacy with her brother was certainly a disadvantage to me now. Jack had apparently been talking too much, and his sister appeared to be thoroughly acquainted with my past. It was a disadvantage. I remembered her vaguely as a girl with long braids, who used to come on Sundays with her father and take tea with us in our rooms. Then she went to Germany to school, and Jack and I employed our Sunday evenings otherwise. It is true that I regarded her weekly visits as a species of infliction, but I did not think I ever showed it.

"'It is strange,' said I, 'that you did not recognize me at once, Miss Holroyd. Have I changed so greatly in five years?'

"'You wore a pointed French beard in Paris,' she said—'a very downy one. And you never stayed to tea but twice, and then you only spoke once.'

"'Oh!' said I, blankly. 'What did I say?'

"'You asked me if I liked plums,' said Daisy, bursting into an irresistible ripple of laughter.

"I saw that I must have made the same sort of an ass of myself that most boys of eighteen do.

"It was too bad. I never thought about the future in those days. Who could have imagined that little Daisy Holroyd would have grown up into this bewildering young lady? It was really too bad. Presently the professor retired to his room, carrying with him an armful of drawings, and bidding us not to sit up late. When he closed his door Miss Holroyd turned to me.

"'Papa will work over those drawings until midnight,' she said, with a despairing smile.

"'It isn't good for him,' I said. 'What are the drawings?'

"'You may know to-morrow,' she answered, leaning forward on the table and shading her face with one hand. 'Tell me about yourself and Jack in Paris.'

"I looked at her suspiciously.

"'What! There isn't much to tell. We studied. Jack went to the law school, and I attended—er—oh, all sorts of schools.'

"'Did you? Surely you gave yourself a little recreation occasionally?'

"'Occasionally,' I nodded.

"'I am afraid you and Jack studied too hard.'

"'That may be,' said I, looking meek.

"'Especially about fossils.'

"I couldn't stand that.

"'Miss Holroyd,' I said, 'I do care for fossils. You may think that I am a humbug, but I have a perfect mania for fossils—now.'

"'Since when?'

"'About an hour ago,' I said, airily. Out of the corner of my eye I saw that she had flushed up. It pleased me.

"'You will soon tire of the experiment,' she said, with a dangerous smile.

"'Oh, I may,' I replied, indifferently.

"She drew back. The movement was scarcely perceptible, but I noticed it, and she knew I did.

"The atmosphere was vaguely hostile. One feels such mental conditions and changes instantly. I picked up a chess-board, opened it, set up the pieces with elaborate care, and began to move, first the white, then the black. Miss Holroyd watched me coldly at first, but after a dozen moves she became interested and leaned a shade nearer. I moved a black pawn forward.

"'Why do you do that?' said Daisy.

"'Because,' said I, 'the white queen threatens the pawn.'

"'It was an aggressive move,' she insisted.

"'Purely defensive,' I said. 'If her white highness will let the pawn alone, the pawn will let the queen alone.'

"Miss Holroyd rested her chin on her wrist and gazed steadily at the board. She was flushing furiously, but she held her ground.

"'If the white queen doesn't block that pawn, the pawn may become dangerous,' she said, coldly.

"I laughed, and closed up the board with a snap.

"'True,' I said, 'it might even take the queen.' After a moment's silence I asked, 'What would you do in that case, Miss Holroyd?'

"'I should resign,' she said, serenely; then, realizing what she had said, she lost her self-possession for a second, and cried: 'No,

indeed! I should fight to the bitter end! I mean—'

"'What?' I asked, lingering over my revenge.

"'I mean,' she said, slowly, 'that your black pawn would never have the chance—never! I should take it immediately.'

"'I believe you would,' said I, smiling; 'so we'll call the game yours, and—the pawn captured.'

"'I don't want it,' she exclaimed. 'A pawn is worthless.'

"'Except when it's in the king row.'

"'Chess is most interesting,' she observed, sedately. She had completely recovered her self-possession. Still I saw that she now had a certain respect for my defensive powers. It was very soothing to me.

"'You know,' said I, gravely, 'that I am fonder of Jack than of anybody. That's the reason we never write each other, except to borrow things. I am afraid that when I was a young cub in France I was not an attractive personality.'

"'On the contrary,' said Daisy, smiling, 'I thought you were very big and very perfect. I had illusions. I wept often when I went home and remembered that you never took the trouble to speak to me but once.'

"'I was a cub,' I said—'not selfish and brutal, but I didn't understand school-girls. I never had any sisters, and I didn't know what to say to very young girls. If I had imagined that you felt hurt—'

"'Oh, I did—five years ago. Afterwards I laughed at the whole thing.'

"'Laughed?' I repeated, vaguely disappointed.

"'Why, of course. I was very easily hurt when I was a child. I think I have outgrown it.'

"The soft curve of her sensitive mouth contradicted her.

"'Will you forgive me now?' I asked.

"'Yes. I had forgotten the whole thing until I met you an hour or so ago.'

"There was something that had a ring not entirely genuine in this speech. I noticed it, but forgot it the next moment.

"Presently she rose, touched her hair with the tip of one finger, and walked to the door.

"'Good-night,' she said.

"'Good-night,' said I, opening the door for her to pass.

Chapter 19

"The sea was a sheet of silver tinged with pink. The tremendous arch of the sky was all shimmering and glimmering with the promise of the sun. Already the mist above, flecked with clustered clouds, flushed with rose color and dull gold. I heard the low splash of the waves breaking and curling across the beach. A wandering breeze, fresh and fragrant, blew the curtains of my window. There was the scent of sweet bay in the room, and everywhere the subtle, nameless perfume of the sea.

"When at last I stood upon the shore, the air and sea were all a-glimmer in a rosy light, deepening to crimson in the zenith. Along the beach I saw a little cove, shelving and all a-shine, where shallow waves washed with a mellow sound. Fine as dusted gold the shingle glowed, and the thin film of water rose, receded, crept up again a little higher, and again flowed back, with the low hiss of snowy foam and gilded bubbles breaking.

"I stood a little while quiet, my eyes upon the water, the invitation of the ocean in my ears, vague and sweet as the murmur of a shell. Then I looked at my bathing-suit and towels.

"'In we go!' said I, aloud. A second later the prophecy was fulfilled.

"I swam far out to sea, and as I swam the waters all around me turned to gold. The sun had risen.

"There is a fragrance in the sea at dawn that none can name. Whitethorn a-bloom in May, sedges a-sway, and scented rushes rustling in an inland wind recall the sea to me—I can't say why.

"Far out at sea I raised myself, swung around, dived, and set out again for shore, striking strong strokes until the necked foam flew.

And when at last I shot through the breakers, I laughed aloud and sprang upon the beach, breathless and happy. Then from the ocean came another cry, clear, joyous, and a white arm rose in the air.

"She came drifting in with the waves like a white sea-sprite, laughing at me, and I plunged into the breakers again to join her.

"Side by side we swam along the coast, just outside the breakers, until in the next cove we saw the flutter of her maid's cap-strings.

"'I will beat you to breakfast!' she cried, as I rested, watching her glide up along the beach.

"'Done!' said I—'for a sea-shell!'

"'Done!' she called, across the water.

"I made good speed along the shore, and I was not long in dressing, but when I entered the dining-room she was there, demure, smiling, exquisite in her cool, white frock.

"'The sea-shell is yours,' said I. 'I hope I can find one with a pearl in it.'

"The professor hurried in before she could reply. He greeted me very cordially, but there was an abstracted air about him, and he called me Dick until I recognized that remonstrance was useless. He was not long over his coffee and rolls.

"'McPeek and Frisby will return with the last load, including your trunk, by early afternoon,' he said, rising and picking up his bundle of drawings. 'I haven't time to explain to you what we are doing, Dick, but Daisy will take you about and instruct you. She will give you the rifle standing in my room—it's a good Winchester. I have sent for an 'Express' for you, big enough to knock over any elephant in India. Daisy, take him through the sheds and tell him everything. Luncheon is at noon. Do you usually take luncheon, Dick?'

"'When I am permitted,' I smiled.

"'Well,' said the professor, doubtfully, 'you mustn't come back here for it. Freda can take you what you want. Is your hand unsteady after eating?'

"'Why, papa!' said Daisy. 'Do you intend to starve him?'

"We all laughed.

"The professor tucked his drawings into a capacious pocket, pulled his sea-boots up to his hips, seized a spade, and left, nodding to us as though he were thinking of something else.

"We went to the door and watched him across the salt meadows until the distant sand-dune hid him.

"'Come,' said Daisy Holroyd, 'I am going to take you to the shop.'

"She put on a broad-brimmed straw hat, a distractingly pretty combination of filmy cool stuffs, and led the way to the long, low structure that I had noticed the evening before.

"The interior was lighted by the numberless little port-holes, and I could see everything plainly. I acknowledge I was nonplussed by what I did see.

"In the centre of the shed, which must have been at least a hundred feet long, stood what I thought at first was the skeleton of an enormous whale. After a moment's silent contemplation of the thing I saw that it could not be a whale, for the frames of two gigantic, batlike wings rose from each shoulder. Also I noticed that the animal possessed legs—four of them—with most unpleasant-looking webbed claws fully eight feet long. The bony framework of the head, too, resembled something between a crocodile and a monstrous snapping-turtle. The walls of the shanty were hung with drawings and blue prints. A man dressed in white linen was tinkering with the vertebrae of the lizard-like tail.

"'Where on earth did such a reptile come from?' I asked at length.

"'Oh, it's not real!' said Daisy, scornfully; 'it's papier-maché.'

"'I see,' said I; 'a stage prop.'

"'A what?' asked Daisy, in hurt astonishment.

"'Why, a—a sort of Siegfried dragon—a what's-his-name—er, Pfafner, or Peffer, or—'

"'If my father heard you say such things he would dislike you,' said Daisy. She looked grieved, and moved towards the door. I apologized—for what, I knew not—and we became reconciled. She ran into her father's room and brought me the rifle, a very good Winchester. She also gave me a cartridge-belt, full.

"'Now,' she smiled, 'I shall take you to your observatory, and when we arrive you are to begin your duty at once.'

"'And that duty?' I ventured, shouldering the rifle.

"'That duty is to watch the ocean. I shall then explain the whole affair—but you mustn't look at me while I speak; you must watch the sea.'

"'This,' said I, 'is hardship. I had rather go without the luncheon.'

"I do not think she was offended at my speech; still she frowned for almost three seconds.

"We passed through acres of sweet bay and spear grass, sometimes skirting thickets of twisted cedars, sometimes walking in the full glare of the morning sun, sinking into shifting sand where sun-scorched shells crackled under our feet, and sun-browned sea-weed glistened, bronzed and iridescent. Then, as we climbed a little hill, the sea-wind freshened in our faces, and lo! the ocean lay below us, far-stretching as the eye could reach, glittering, magnificent.

"Daisy sat down flat on the sand. It takes a clever girl to do that and retain the respectful deference due her from men. It takes a graceful girl to accomplish it triumphantly when a man is looking.

"'You must sit beside me,' she said—as though it would prove irksome to me.

"'Now,' she continued, 'you must watch the water while I am talking.'

"I nodded.

"'Why don't you do it, then?' she asked.

"I succeeded in wrenching my head towards the ocean, although I felt sure it would swing gradually round again in spite of me.

"'To begin with,' said Daisy Holroyd, 'there's a thing in that ocean that would astonish you if you saw it. Turn your head!'

"'I am,' I said, meekly.

"'Did you hear what I said?'

"'Yes—er—a thing in the ocean that's going to astonish me.' Visions of mermaids rose before me.

"'The thing,' said Daisy, 'is a thermosaurus!'

"I nodded vaguely, as though anticipating a delightful introduction to a nautical friend.

"'You don't seem astonished,' she said, reproachfully.

"'Why should I be?' I asked.

"'Please turn your eyes towards the water. Suppose a thermosaurus should look out of the waves!'

"'Well,' said I, 'in that case the pleasure would be mutual.'

"She frowned and bit her upper lip.

"'Do you know what a thermosaurus is?' she asked.

"'If I am to guess,' said I, 'I guess it's a jelly-fish.'

"'It's that big, ugly, horrible creature that I showed you in the shed!' cried Daisy, impatiently.

"'Eh!' I stammered.

"'Not papier-maché, either,' she continued, excitedly; 'it's a real one.'

"This was pleasant news. I glanced instinctively at my rifle and then at the ocean.

"'Well,' said I at last, 'it strikes me that you and I resemble a pair of Andromedas waiting to be swallowed. This rifle won't stop a beast, a live beast, like that Nibelungen dragon of yours.'

"'Yes, it will,' she said; 'it's not an ordinary rifle.'

"Then, for the first time, I noticed, just below the magazine, a cylindrical attachment that was strange to me.

"'Now, if you will watch the sea very carefully, and will promise not to look at me,' said Daisy, 'I will try to explain.'

"She did not wait for me to promise, but went on eagerly, a sparkle of excitement in her blue eyes:

"'You know, of all the fossil remains of the great batlike and lizard-like creatures that inhabited the earth ages and ages ago, the bones of the gigantic saurians are the most interesting. I think they used to splash about the water and fly over the land during the carboniferous period; anyway, it doesn't matter. Of course you have seen pictures of reconstructed creatures such as the ichthyosaurus, the plesiosaurus, the anthracosaurus, and the thermosaurus?'

"I nodded, trying to keep my eyes from hers.

"'And you know that the remains of the thermosaurus were first discovered and reconstructed by papa?'

"'Yes,' said I. There was no use in saying no.

"'I am glad you do. Now, papa has proved that this creature lived entirely in the Gulf Stream, emerging for occasional flights across an ocean or two. Can you imagine how he proved it?'

"'No,' said I, resolutely pointing my nose at the ocean.

"'He proved it by a minute examination of the microscopical shells found among the ribs of the thermosaurus. These shells contained little creatures that live only in the warm waters of the Gulf Stream. They were the food of the thermosaurus.'

"'It was rather slender rations for a thing like that, wasn't it? Did he ever swallow bigger food—er—men?'

"'Oh yes. Tons of fossil bones from prehistoric men are also found in the interior of the thermosaurus.'

"'Then,' said I, 'you, at least, had better go back to Captain McPeek's—'

"'Please turn around; don't be so foolish. I didn't say there was a live thermosaurus in the water, did I?'

"'Isn't there?'

"'Why, no!'

"My relief was genuine, but I thought of the rifle and looked suspiciously out to sea.

"'What's the Winchester for?' I asked.

"'Listen, and I will explain. Papa has found out—how, I do not exactly understand—that there is in the waters of the Gulf Stream the body of a thermosaurus. The creature must have been alive within a year or so. The impenetrable scale-armor that covers its body has, as far as papa knows, prevented its disintegration. We know that it is there still, or was there within a few months. Papa has reports and sworn depositions from steamer captains and seamen from a dozen different vessels, all corroborating one another in essential details. These stories, of course, get into the newspapers—sea-serpent stories—but papa knows that they confirm his theory that the huge body of this reptile is swinging along somewhere in the Gulf Stream.'

"She opened her sunshade and held it over her. I noticed that she deigned to give me the benefit of about one-eighth of it.

"'Your duty with that rifle is this: if we are fortunate enough to see the body of the thermosaurus come floating by, you are to take good aim and fire—fire rapidly every bullet in the magazine; then reload and fire again, and reload and fire as long as you have any cartridges left.'

"'A self-feeding Maxim is what I should have,' I said, with gentle sarcasm. 'Well, and suppose I make a sieve of this big lizard?'

"'Do you see these rings in the sand?' she asked.

"Sure enough, somebody had driven heavy piles deep into the sand all around us, and to the tops of these piles were attached steel

rings, half buried under the spear-grass. We sat almost exactly in the centre of a circle of these rings.

"'The reason is this,' said Daisy; 'every bullet in your cartridges is steel-tipped and armor-piercing. To the base of each bullet is attached a thin wire of pallium. Pallium is that new metal, a thread of which, drawn out into finest wire, will hold a ton of iron suspended. Every bullet is fitted with minute coils of miles of this wire. When the bullet leaves the rifle it spins out this wire as a shot from a life-saver's mortar spins out and carries the life-line to a wrecked ship. The end of each coil of wire is attached to that cylinder under the magazine of your rifle. As soon as the shell is automatically ejected this wire flies out also. A bit of scarlet tape is fixed to the end, so that it will be easy to pick up. There is also a snap-clasp on the end, and this clasp fits those rings that you see in the sand. Now, when you begin firing, it is my duty to run and pick up the wire ends and attach them to the rings. Then, you see, we have the body of the thermosaurus full of bullets, every bullet anchored to the shore by tiny wires, each of which could easily hold a ton's strain.'

"I looked at her in amazement.

"'Then,' she added, calmly, 'we have captured the thermosaurus.'

"'Your father,' said I, at length, 'must have spent years of labor over this preparation.'

"'It is the work of a lifetime,' she said, simply.

"My face, I suppose, showed my misgivings.

"'It must not fail,' she added.

"'But—but we are nowhere near the Gulf Stream,' I ventured.

"Her face brightened, and she frankly held the sunshade over us both.

"'Ah, you don't know,' she said, 'what else papa has discovered. Would you believe that he has found a loop in the Gulf Stream—a genuine loop—that swings in here just outside of the breakers below? It is true! Everybody on Long Island knows that there is a warm current off the coast, but nobody imagined it was merely a sort of backwater from the Gulf Stream that formed a great circular mill-race around the cone of a subterranean volcano, and rejoined the Gulf Stream off Cape Albatross. But it is! That is why papa bought a

yacht three years ago and sailed about for two years so mysteriously. Oh, I did want to go with him so much!'

"'This,' said I, 'is most astonishing.'

"She leaned enthusiastically towards me, her lovely face aglow.

"'Isn't it?' she said; 'and to think that you and papa and I are the only people in the whole world who know this!'

"To be included in such a triology was very delightful.

"'Papa is writing the whole thing—I mean about the currents. He also has in preparation sixteen volumes on the thermosaurus. He said this morning that he was going to ask you to write the story first for some scientific magazine. He is certain that Professor Bruce Stoddard, of Columbia, will write the pamphlets necessary. This will give papa time to attend to the sixteen-volume work, which he expects to finish in three years.'

"'Let us first,' said I, laughing, 'catch our thermosaurus.'

"'We must not fail,' she said, wistfully.

"'We shall not fail,' I said, 'for I promise to sit on this sand-hill as long as I live—until a thermosaurus appears—if that is your wish, Miss Holroyd.'

"Our eyes met for an instant. She did not chide me, either, for not looking at the ocean. Her eyes were bluer, anyway.

"'I suppose,' she said, bending her head and absently pouring sand between her fingers—'I suppose you think me a blue-stocking, or something odious?'

"'Not exactly,' I said. There was an emphasis in my voice that made her color. After a moment she laid the sunshade down, still open.

"'May I hold it?' I asked.

"She nodded almost imperceptibly.

"The ocean had turned a deep marine blue, verging on purple, that heralded a scorching afternoon. The wind died away; the odor of cedar and sweet-bay hung heavy in the air.

"In the sand at our feet an iridescent flower-beetle crawled, its metallic green-and-blue wings burning like a spark. Great gnats, with filmy, glittering wings, danced aimlessly above the young golden-rod; burnished crickets, inquisitive, timid, ran from under chips of driftwood, waved their antennæ at us, and ran back again. One by

one the marbled tiger-beetles tumbled at our feet, dazed from the exertion of an aërial flight, then scrambled and ran a little way, or darted into the wire grass, where great, brilliant spiders eyed them askance from their gossamer hammocks.

"Far out at sea the white gulls floated and drifted on the water, or sailed up into the air to flap lazily for a moment and settle back among the waves. Strings of black surf-ducks passed, their strong wings tipping the surface of the water; single wandering coots whirled from the breakers into lonely flight towards the horizon.

"We lay and watched the little ring-necks running along the water's edge, now backing away from the incoming tide, now boldly wading after the undertow. The harmony of silence, the deep perfume, the mystery of waiting for that something that all await—what is it? love? death? or only the miracle of another morrow?—troubled me with vague restlessness. As sunlight casts shadows, happiness, too, throws a shadow, an the shadow is sadness.

"And so the morning wore away until Freda came with a cool-looking hamper. Then delicious cold fowl and lettuce sandwiches and champagne cup set our tongues wagging as only very young tongues can wag. Daisy went back with Freda after luncheon, leaving me a case of cigars, with a bantering smile. I dozed, half awake, keeping a partly closed eye on the ocean, where a faint gray streak showed plainly amid the azure water all around. That was the Gulf Stream loop.

"About four o'clock Frisby appeared with a bamboo shelter-tent, for which I was unaffectedly grateful.

"After he had erected it over me he stopped to chat a bit, but the conversation bored me, for he could talk of nothing but bill-posting.

"'You wouldn't ruin the landscape here, would you?' I asked.

"'Ruin it!' repeated Frisby, nervously. 'It's ruined now; there ain't a place to stick a bill.'

"'The snipe stick bills—in the sand,' I said, flippantly.

"There was no humor about Frisby. 'Do they?' he asked.

"I moved with a certain impatience.

"'Bills,' said Frisby, 'give spice an' variety to nature. They break the monotony of the everlastin' green and what-you-may-call-its.'

"I glared at him.

"'Bills,' he continued, 'are not easy to stick, lemme tell you, sir. Sign-paintin's a soft snap when it comes to bill-stickin'. Now, I guess I've stuck more bills onto New York State than ennybody.'

"'Have you?' I said, angrily.

"'Yes, siree! I always pick out the purtiest spots—kinder filled chuck full of woods and brooks and things; then I h'ist my paste-pot onto a rock, and I slather that rock with gum, and whoop she goes!'

"'Whoop what goes?'

"'The bill. I paste her onto the rock, with one swipe of the brush for the edges and a back-handed swipe for the finish—except when a bill is folded in two halves.'

"'And what do you do then?' I asked, disgusted.

"'Swipe twice,' said Frisby, with enthusiasm.

"'And you don't think it injures the landscape?'

"'Injures it!' he exclaimed, convinced that I was attempting to joke.

"I looked wearily out to sea. He also looked at the water and sighed sentimentally.

"'Floatin' buoys with bills onto 'em is a idea of mine,' he observed. 'That damn ocean is monotonous, ain't it?'

"I don't know what I might have done to Frisby—the rifle was so convenient—if his mean yellow dog had not waddled up at this juncture.

"'Hi, Davy, sic 'em!' said Frisby, expectorating upon a clam-shell and hurling it seaward. The cur watched the flight of the shell apathetically, then squatted in the sand and looked at his master.

"'Kinder lost his spirit,' said Frisby, 'ain't he? I once stuck a bill onto Davy, an' it come off, an' the paste sorter sickened him. He was hell on rats—once!'

"After a moment or two Frisby took himself off, whistling cheerfully to Davy, who followed him when he was ready. The rifle burned in my fingers.

"It was nearly six o'clock when the professor appeared, spade on shoulder, boots smeared with mud.

"'Well,' he said, 'nothing to report, Dick, my boy?'

"'Nothing, professor.'

"He wiped his shining face with his handkerchief and stared at the water.

"'My calculations lead me to believe,' he said, 'that our prize may be due any day now. This theory I base upon the result of the report from the last sea-captain I saw. I cannot understand why some of these captains did not take the carcass in tow. They all say that they tried, but that the body sank before they could come within half a mile. The truth is, probably, that they did not stir a foot from their course to examine the thing.'

"'Have you ever cruised about for it?' I ventured.

"'For two years,' he said, grimly. 'It's no use; it's accident when a ship falls in with it. One captain reports it a thousand miles from where the last skipper spoke it, and always in the Gulf Stream. They think it is a different specimen every time, and the papers are teeming with sea-serpent fol-de-rol.'

"'Are you sure,' I asked, 'that it will swing into the coast on this Gulf Stream loop?'

"'I think I may say that it is certain to do so. I experimented with a dead right-whale. You may have heard of its coming ashore here last summer.'

"'I think I did,' said I, with a faint smile. The thing had poisoned the air for miles around.

"'But,' I continued, 'suppose it comes in the night?'

"He laughed.

"'There I am lucky. Every night this month, and every day, too, the current of the loop runs inland so far that even a porpoise would strand for at least twelve hours. Longer than that I have not experimented with, but I know that the shore trend of the loop runs across a long spur of the submerged volcanic mountain, and that anything heavier than a porpoise would scrape the bottom and be carried so slowly that at least twelve hours must elapse before the carcass could float again into deep water. There are chances of its stranding indefinitely, too, but I don't care to take those chances. That is why I have stationed you here, Dick.'

"He glanced again at the water, smiling to himself.

"'There is another question I want to ask,' I said, 'if you don't mind.'

"'Of course not!' he said, warmly.

"'What are you digging for?'

"'Why, simply for exercise. The doctor told me I was killing myself with my sedentary habits, so I decided to dig. I don't know a better exercise. Do you?'

"'I suppose not,' I murmured, rather red in the face. I wondered whether he'd mention fossils.

"'Did Daisy tell you why we are making our papier-maché thermosaurus?' he asked.

"I shook my head.

"'We constructed that from measurements I took from the fossil remains of the thermosaurus in the Metropolitan Museum. Professor Bruce Stoddard made the drawings. We set it up here, all ready to receive the skin of the carcass that I am expecting.'

"We had started towards home, walking slowly across the darkening dunes, shoulder to shoulder. The sand was deep, and walking was not easy.

"'I wish,' said I at last, 'that I knew why Miss Holroyd asked me not to walk on the beach. It's much less fatiguing.'

"'That,' said the professor, 'is a matter that I intend to discuss with you to-night.' He spoke gravely, almost sadly. I felt that something of unparalleled importance was soon to be revealed. So I kept very quiet, watching the ocean out of the corners of my eyes.

Chapter 20

"Dinner was ended. Daisy Holroyd lighted her father's pipe for him, and insisted on my smoking as much as I pleased. Then she sat down, and folded her hands like a good little girl, waiting for her father to make the revelation which I felt in my bones must be something out of the ordinary.

"The professor smoked for a while, gazing meditatively at his daughter; then, fixing his gray eyes on me, he said:

"'Have you ever heard of the kree—that Australian bird, half parrot, half hawk, that destroys so many sheep in New South Wales?'

"I nodded.

"'The kree kills a sheep by alighting on its back and tearing away the flesh with its hooked beak until a vital part is reached. You know that? Well, it has been discovered that the kree had prehistoric prototypes. These birds were enormous creatures, who preyed upon mammoths and mastodons, and even upon the great saurians. It has been conclusively proved that a few saurians have been killed by the ancestors of the kree, but the favorite food of these birds was undoubtedly the thermosaurus. It is believed that the birds attacked the eyes of the thermosaurus, and when, as was its habit, the mammoth creature turned on its back to claw them, they fell upon the thinner scales of its stomach armor and finally killed it. This, of course, is a theory, but we have almost absolute proofs of its correctness. Now, these two birds are known among scientists as the ekaf-bird and the ool-yllik. The names are Australian, in which country most of their remains have been unearthed. They lived during the Carboniferous period. Now, it is not generally known, but

the fact is, that in 1801 Captain Ransom, of the British exploring vessel *Gull*, purchased from the natives of Tasmania the skin of an ekaf-bird that could not have been killed more than twenty-four hours previous to its sale. I saw this skin in the British Museum. It was labelled, "Unknown bird, probably extinct." It took me exactly a week to satisfy myself that it was actually the skin of an ekaf-bird. But that is not all, Dick,' continued the professor, excitedly. 'In 1854 Admiral Stuart, of our own navy, saw the carcass of a strange, gigantic bird floating along the southern coast of Australia. Sharks were after it, and before a boat could be lowered these miserable fish got it. But the good old admiral secured a few feathers and sent them to the Smithsonian. I saw them. They were not even labelled, but I knew that they were feathers from the ekaf-bird or its near relative, the ool-yllik.'

"I had grown so interested that I had leaned far across the table. Daisy, too, bent forward. It was only when the professor paused for a moment that I noticed how close together our heads were—Daisy's and mine. I don't think she realized it. She did not move.

"'Now comes the important part of this long discourse,' said the professor, smiling at our eagerness. "'Ever since the carcass of our derelict thermosaurus was first noticed, every captain who has seen it has also reported the presence of one or more gigantic birds in the neighborhood. These birds, at a great distance, appeared to be hovering over the carcass, but on the approach of a vessel they disappeared. Even in mid-ocean they were observed. When I heard about it I was puzzled. A month later I was satisfied that neither the ekaf-bird nor the ool-yllik was extinct. Last Monday I knew that I was right. I found forty-eight distinct impressions of the huge, seven-toed claw of the ekaf-bird on the beach here at Pine Inlet. You may imagine my excitement. I succeeded in digging up enough wet sand around one of these impressions to preserve its form. I managed to get it into a soap-box, and now it is there in my shop. The tide rose too rapidly for me to save the other footprints.'

"I shuddered at the possibility of a clumsy misstep on my part obliterating the impression of an ool-yllik.

"'That is the reason that my daughter warned you off the beach,' he said, mildly.

"'Hanging would have been too good for the vandal who destroyed such priceless prizes,' I cried out, in self-reproach.

"Daisy Holroyd turned a flushed face to mine and impulsively laid her hand on my sleeve.

"'How could you know?' she said.

"'It's all right now,' said her father, emphasizing each word with a gentle tap of his pipe-bowl on the table-edge; 'don't be hard on yourself, Dick. You'll do yeoman's service yet.'

"It was nearly midnight, and still we chatted on about the thermosaurus, the ekaf-bird, and the ool-yllik, eagerly discussing the probability of the great reptile's carcass being in the vicinity. That alone seemed to explain the presence of these prehistoric birds at Pine Inlet.

"'Do they ever attack human beings?' I asked.

"The professor looked startled.

"'Gracious!' he exclaimed, 'I never thought of that. And Daisy running about out-of-doors! Dear me! It takes a scientist to be an unnatural parent!'

"His alarm was half real, half assumed; but, all the same, he glanced gravely at us both, shaking his handsome head, absorbed in thought. Daisy herself looked a little doubtful. As for me, my sensations were distinctly queer.

"'It is true,' said the professor, frowning at the wall, 'that human remains have been found associated with the bones of the ekaf-bird —I don't know how intimately. It is a matter to be taken into most serious consideration.'

"'The problem can be solved,' said I, 'in several ways. One is, to keep Miss Holroyd in the house—'

"'I shall not stay in,' cried Daisy, indignantly.

"We all laughed, and her father assured her that she should not be abused.

"'Even if I did stay in,' she said, 'one of these birds might alight on Master Dick.'

"She looked saucily at me as she spoke, but turned crimson when her father observed, quietly, 'You don't seem to think of me, Daisy!'

"'Of course I do,' she said, getting up and putting both arms around her father's neck; 'but Dick—as—as you call him—is so

helpless and timid.'

"My blissful smile froze on my lips.

"'Timid!' I repeated.

"She came back to the table, making me a mocking reverence.

"'Do you think I am to be laughed at with impunity?' she said.

"'What are your other plans, Dick?' asked the professor. 'Daisy, let him alone, you little tease!'

"'One is, to haul a lot of cast-iron boilers along the dunes,' I said. 'If these birds come when the carcass floats in, and if they seem disposed to trouble us, we could crawl into the boilers and be safe.'

"'Why, that is really brilliant!' cried Daisy.

"'Be quiet, my child. Dick, the plan is sound and sensible and perfectly practical. McPeek and Frisby shall go for a dozen loads of boilers to-morrow.'

"'It will spoil the beauty of the landscape,' said Daisy, with a taunting nod to me.

"'And Frisby will probably attempt to cover them with bill-posters,' I added, laughing.

"'That,' said Daisy, 'I shall prevent, even at the cost of his life.' And she stood up, looking very determined.

"'Children, children,' protested the professor, 'go to bed—you bother me.'

"Then I turned deliberately to Miss Holroyd.

"'Good-night, Daisy,' I said.

"'Good-night, Dick,' she said, very gently.

Chapter 21

"The week passed quickly for me, leaving but few definite impressions. As I look back to it now I can see the long stretch of beach burning in the fierce sunlight, the endless meadows, with the glimmer of water in the distance, the dunes, the twisted cedars, the leagues of scintillating ocean, rocking, rocking, always rocking. In the starlit nights the curlew came in from the sand-bars by twos and threes; I could hear their querulous call as I lay in bed thinking. All day long the little ring-necks whistled from the shore. The plover answered them from distant, lonely inland pools. The great white gulls drifted like feathers upon the sea.

"One morning towards the end of the week, I, strolling along the dunes, came upon Frisby. He was bill-posting. I caught him red-handed.

"'This,' said I, 'must stop. Do you understand, Mr. Frisby?'

"He stepped back from his work, laying his head on one side, considering first me, then the bill that he had pasted on one of our big boilers.

"'Don't you like the color?' he asked. 'It goes well on them black boilers.'

"'Color! No, I don't like the color, either. Can't you understand that there are some people in the world who object to seeing patent-medicine advertisements scattered over a landscape?'

"'Hey?' he said, perplexed.

"'Will you kindly remove that advertisement?' I persisted.

"'Too late,' said Frisby; 'it's sot.'

"I was too disgusted to speak, but my disgust turned to anger when I perceived that, as far as the eye could reach, our boilers, lying from three to four hundred feet apart, were ablaze with yellow-and-red posters extolling the 'Eureka Liver Pill Company.'

"'It don't cost 'em nothin',' said Frisby, cheerfully; 'I done it fur the fun of it. Purty, ain't it?'

"'They are Professor Holroyd's boilers,' I said, subduing a desire to beat Frisby with my telescope. 'Wait until Miss Holroyd sees this work.'

"'Don't she like yeller and red?' he demanded, anxiously.

"'You'll find out,' said I.

"Frisby gaped at his handiwork and then at his yellow dog. After a moment he mechanically spat on a clam-shell and requested Davy to 'sic' it.

"'Can't you comprehend that you have ruined our pleasure in the landscape?' I asked, more mildly.

"'I've got some green bills,' said Frisby; 'I kin stick 'em over the yeller ones—'

"'Confound it,' said I, 'it isn't the color!'

"'Then,' observed Frisby, 'you don't like them pills. I've got some bills of the "Cropper Automobile" and a few of "Bagley, the Gents' Tailor"—'

"'Frisby,' said I, 'use them all—paste the whole collection over your dog and yourself—then walk off the cliff.'

"He sullenly unfolded a green poster, swabbed the boiler with paste, laid the upper section of the bill upon it, and plastered the whole bill down with a thwack of his brush. As I walked away I heard him muttering.

"Next day Daisy was so horrified that I promised to give Frisby an ultimatum. I found him with Freda, gazing sentimentally at his work, and I sent him back to the shop in a hurry, telling Freda at the same time that she could spend her leisure in providing Mr. Frisby with sand, soap, and a scrubbing-brush. Then I walked on to my post of observation.

"I watched until sunset. Daisy came with her father to hear my report, but there was nothing to tell, and we three walked slowly back to the house.

"In the evenings the professor worked on his volumes, the click of his type-writer sounding faintly behind his closed door. Daisy and I played chess sometimes; sometimes we played hearts. I don't remember that we ever finished a game of either—we talked too much.

"Our discussions covered every topic of interest: we argued upon politics; we skimmed over literature and music; we settled international differences; we spoke vaguely of human brotherhood. I say we slighted no subject of interest—I am wrong; we never spoke of love.

"Now, love is a matter of interest to ten people out of ten. Why it was that it did not appear to interest us is as interesting a question as love itself. We were young, alert, enthusiastic, inquiring. We eagerly absorbed theories concerning any curious phenomena in nature, as intellectual cocktails to stimulate discussion. And yet we did not discuss love. I do not say that we avoided it. No; the subject was too completely ignored for even that. And yet we found it very difficult to pass an hour separated. The professor noticed this, and laughed at us. We were not even embarrassed.

"Sunday passed in pious contemplation of the ocean. Daisy read a little in her prayer-book, and the professor threw a cloth over his type-writer and strolled up and down the sands. He may have been lost in devout abstraction; he may have been looking for footprints. As for me, my mind was very serene, and I was more than happy. Daisy read to me a little for my soul's sake, and the professor came up and said something cheerful. He also examined the magazine of my Winchester.

"That night, too, Daisy took her guitar to the sands and sang one or two Basque hymns. Unlike us, the Basques do not take their pleasures sadly. One of their pleasures is evidently religion.

"The big moon came up over the dunes and stared at the sea until the surface of every wave trembled with radiance. A sudden stillness fell across the world; the wind died out; the foam ran noiselessly across the beach; the cricket's rune was stilled.

"I leaned back, dropping one hand upon the sand. It touched another hand, soft and cool.

"After a while the other hand moved slightly, and I found that my own had closed above it. Presently one finger stirred a little—only a little—for our fingers were interlocked.

"On the shore the foam-froth bubbled and winked and glimmered in the moonlight. A star fell from the zenith, showering the night with incandescent dust.

"If our fingers lay interlaced beside us, her eyes were calm and serene as always, wide open, fixed upon the depths of a dark sky. And when her father rose and spoke to us, she did not withdraw her hand.

"'Is it late?' she asked, dreamily.

"'It is midnight, little daughter.'

"I stood up, still holding her hand, and aided her to rise. And when, at the door, I said good-night, she turned and looked at me for a little while in silence, then passed into her room slowly, with head still turned towards me.

"All night long I dreamed of her; and when the east whitened, I sprang up, the thunder of the ocean in my ears, the strong sea-wind blowing into the open window.

"'She's asleep,' I thought, and I leaned from the window and peered out into the east.

"The sea called to me, tossing its thousand arms; the soaring gulls, dipping, rising, wheeling above the sandbar, screamed and clamored for a playmate. I slipped into my bathing-suit, dropped from the window upon the soft sand, and in a moment had plunged head foremost into the surf, swimming beneath the waves towards the open sea.

"Under the tossing ocean the voice of the waters was in my ears—a low, sweet voice, intimate, mysterious. Through singing foam and broad, green, glassy depths, by whispering sandy channels atrail with sea-weed, and on, on, out into the vague, cool sea, I sped, rising to the top, sinking, gliding. Then at last I flung myself out of water, hands raised, and the clamor of the gulls filled my ears.

"As I lay, breathing fast, drifting on the sea, far out beyond the gulls I saw a flash of white, and an arm was lifted, signalling me.

"'Daisy!' I called.

"A clear hail came across the water, distinct on the sea-wind, and at the same instant we raised our hands and moved towards each other.

"How we laughed as we met in the sea! The white dawn came up out of the depths, the zenith turned to rose and ashes.

"And with the dawn came the wind—a great sea-wind, fresh, aromatic, that hurled our voices back into our throats and lifted the sheeted spray above our heads. Every wave, crowned with mist, caught us in a cool embrace, cradled us, and slipped away, only to leave us to another wave, higher, stronger, crested with opalescent glory, breathing incense.

"We turned together up the coast, swimming lightly side by side, but our words were caught up by the winds and whirled into the sky.

"We looked up at the driving clouds; we looked out upon the pallid waste of waters, but it was into each other's eyes we looked, wondering, wistful, questioning the reason of sky and sea And there in each other's eyes we read the mystery, and we knew that earth and sky and sea were created for us alone.

"Drifting on by distant sands and dunes, her white fingers touching mine, we spoke, keying our tones to the wind's vast harmony. And we spoke of love.

"Gray and wide as the limitless span of the sky and the sea, the winds gathered from the world's ends to bear us on; but they were not familiar winds; for now, along the coast, the breakers curled and showed a million fangs, and the ocean stirred to its depths, uneasy, ominous, and the menace of its murmur drew us closer as we moved.

"Where the dull thunder and the tossing spray warned us from sunken reefs, we heard the harsh challenges of gulls; where the pallid surf twisted in yellow coils of spume above the bar, the singing sands murmured of treachery and secrets of lost souls agasp in the throes of silent undertows.

"But there was a little stretch of beach glimmering through the mountains of water, and towards this we turned, side by side. Around us the water grew warmer; the breath of the following waves moistened our cheeks; the water itself grew gray and strange about us.

"'We have come too far,' I said; but she only answered:

"'Faster, faster! I am afraid!' The water was almost hot now; its aromatic odor filled our lungs.

"'The Gulf loop!' I muttered. 'Daisy, shall I help you?'

"'No. Swim—close by me! Oh-h! Dick—'

"Her startled cry was echoed by another—a shrill scream, unutterably horrible—and a great bird flapped from the beach, splashing and beating its pinions across the water with a thundering noise.

"Out across the waves it blundered, rising little by little from the water, and now, to my horror, I saw another monstrous bird swinging in the air above it, squealing as it turned on its vast wings. Before I could speak we touched the beach, and I half lifted her to the shore.

"'Quick!' I repeated. 'We must not wait.'

"Her eyes were dark with fear, but she rested a hand on my shoulder, and we crept up among the dune-grasses and sank down by the point of sand where the rough shelter stood, surrounded by the iron-ringed piles.

"She lay there, breathing fast and deep, dripping with spray. I had no power of speech left, but when I rose wearily to my knees and looked out upon the water my blood ran cold. Above the ocean, on the breast of the roaring wind, three enormous birds sailed, turning and wheeling among one another; and below, drifting with the gray stream of the Gulf loop, a colossal bulk lay half submerged—a gigantic lizard, floating belly upward.

"Then Daisy crept kneeling to my side and touched me, trembling from head to foot.

"'I know,' I muttered. 'I must run back for the rifle.'

"'And—and leave me?'

"I took her by the hand, and we dragged ourselves through the wire-grass to the open end of a boiler lying in the sand.

"She crept in on her hands and knees, and called to me to follow.

"'You are safe now,' I cried. 'I must go back for the rifle.'

"'The birds may—may attack you.'

"'If they do I can get into one of the other boilers,' I said. 'Daisy, you must not venture out until I come back. You won't, will you?'

"'No-o,' she whispered, doubtfully.

"'Then—good-bye.'

"'Good-bye,' she answered, but her voice was very small and still.

"'Good-bye,' I said again. I was kneeling at the mouth of the big iron tunnel; it was dark inside and I could not see her, but, before I was conscious of it, her arms were around my neck and we had kissed each other.

"I don't remember how I went away. When I came to my proper senses I was swimming along the coast at full speed, and over my head wheeled one of the birds, screaming at every turn.

"The intoxication of that innocent embrace, the close impress of her arms around my neck, gave me a strength and recklessness that neither fear nor fatigue could subdue. The bird above me did not even frighten me. I watched it over my shoulder, swimming strongly, with the tide now aiding me, now stemming my course; but I saw the shore passing quickly, and my strength increased, and I shouted when I came in sight of the house, and scrambled up on the sand, dripping and excited. There was nobody in sight, and I gave a last glance up into the air where the bird wheeled, still screeching, and hastened into the house. Freda stared at me in amazement as I seized the rifle and shouted for the professor.

"'He has just gone to town, with Captain McPeek in his wagon,' stammered Freda.

"'What!' I cried. 'Does he know where his daughter is?'

"'Miss Holroyd is asleep—not?' gasped Freda.

"'Where's Frisby?' I cried, impatiently.

"'Yimmie?' quavered Freda.

"'Yes, Jimmie; isn't there anybody here? Good Heavens! where's that man in the shop?'

"'He also iss gone,' said Freda, shedding tears, 'to buy papier-maché. Yimmie, he iss gone to post bills.'

"I waited to hear no more, but swung my rifle over my shoulder, and, hanging the cartridge-belt across my chest, hurried out and up the beach. The bird was not in sight.

"I had been running for perhaps a minute when, far up on the dunes, I saw a yellow dog rush madly through a clump of sweet-bay, and at the same moment a bird soared past, rose, and hung hovering just above the thicket. Suddenly the bird swooped; there

was a shriek and a yelp from the cur, but the bird gripped it in one claw and beat its wings upon the sand, striving to rise. Then I saw Frisby—paste, bucket, and brush raised—fall upon the bird, yelling lustily. The fierce creature relaxed its talons, and the dog rushed on, squeaking with terror. The bird turned on Frisby and sent him sprawling on his face, a sticky mass of paste and sand. But this did not end the struggle. The bird, croaking horridly, flew at the prostrate bill-poster, and the sand whirled into a pillar above its terrible wings. Scarcely knowing what I was about, I raised my rifle and fired twice. A scream echoed each shot, and the bird rose heavily in a shower of sand; but two bullets were embedded in that mass of foul feathers, and I saw the wires and scarlet tape uncoiling on the sand at my feet. In an instant I seized them and passed the ends around a cedar-tree, hooking the clasps tight. Then I cast one swift glance upward, where the bird wheeled, screeching, anchored like a kite to the pallium wires; and I hurried on across the dunes, the shells cutting my feet and the bushes tearing my wet swimming-suit, until I dripped with blood from shoulder to ankle. Out in the ocean the carcass of the thermosaurus floated, claws outspread, belly glistening in the gray light, and over him circled two birds. As I reached the shelter I knelt and fired into the mass of scales, and at my first shot a horrible thing occurred—the lizard-like head writhed, the slitted yellow eyes sliding open from the film that covered them. A shudder passed across the undulating body, the great scaled belly heaved, and one leg feebly clawed at the air.

"The thing was still alive!

"Crushing back the horror that almost paralyzed my hands, I planted shot after shot into the quivering reptile, while it writhed and clawed, striving to turn over and dive; and at each shot the black blood spurted in long, slim jets across the water. And now Daisy was at my side, pale and determined, swiftly clasping each tape-marked wire to the iron rings in the circle around us. Twice I filled the magazine from my belt, and twice I poured streams of steel-tipped bullets into the scaled mass, twisting and shuddering on the sea. Suddenly the birds steered towards us. I felt the wind from their vast wings. I saw the feathers erect, vibrating. I saw the spread claws outstretched, and I struck furiously at them, crying to Daisy to run

into the iron shelter. Backing, swinging my clubbed rifle, I retreated, but I tripped across one of the taut pallium wires, and in an instant the hideous birds were on me, and the bone in my forearm snapped like a pipe-stem at a blow from their wings. Twice I struggled to my knees, blinded with blood, confused, almost fainting; then I fell again, rolling into the mouth of the iron boiler.

"When I struggled back to consciousness Daisy knelt silently beside me, while Captain McPeek and Professor Holroyd bound up my shattered arm, talking excitedly. The pain made me faint and dizzy. I tried to speak and could not. At last they got me to my feet and into the wagon, and Daisy came, too, and crouched beside me, wrapped in oilskins to her eyes. Fatigue, lack of food, and excitement had combined with wounds and broken bones to extinguish the last atom of strength in my body; but my mind was clear enough to understand that the trouble was over and the thermosaurus safe.

"I heard McPeek say that one of the birds that I had anchored to a cedar-tree had torn loose from the bullets and had winged its way heavily out to sea. The professor answered: 'Yes, the ekaf-bird; the others were ool-ylliks. I'd have given my right arm to have secured them.' Then for a time I heard no more; but the jolting of the wagon over the dunes roused me to keenest pain, and I held out my right hand to Daisy. She clasped it in both of hers, and kissed it again and again.

"There is little more to add, I think. Professor Bruce Stoddard's scientific pamphlet will be published soon, to be followed by Professor Holroyd's sixteen volumes. In a few days the stuffed and mounted thermosaurus will be placed on free public exhibition in the arena of Madison Square Garden, the only building in the city large enough to contain the body of this immense winged reptile."

The young man hesitated, looking long and earnestly at Miss Barrison.

"Did you marry her?" she asked, softly.

"You wouldn't believe it," said the young man, earnestly—"you wouldn't believe it, after all that happened, if I should tell you that she married Professor Bruce Stoddard, of Columbia—would you?"

"Yes, I would," said Miss Barrison. "You never can tell what a girl will do."

"That story of yours," I said, "is to me the most wonderful and valuable contribution to nature study that it has ever been my fortune to listen to. You are fitted to write; it is your sacred mission to produce. Are you going to?"

"I am writing," said the young man, quietly, "a nature book. Sir Peter Grebe's magnificent monograph on the speckled titmouse inspired me. But nature study is not what I have chosen as my life's mission."

He looked dreamily across at Miss Barrison. "No, not natural phenomena," he repeated, "but unnatural phenomena. What Professor Hyssop has done for Columbia, I shall attempt to do for Harvard. In fact, I have already accepted the chair of Psychical Phenomena at Cambridge."

I gazed upon him with intense respect.

"A personal experience revealed to me my life's work," he, went on, thoughtfully stroking his blond mustache. "If Miss Barrison would care to hear it—"

"Please tell it," she said, sweetly.

"I shall have to relate it clothed in that artificial garb known as literary style," he explained, deprecatingly.

"It doesn't matter," I said, "I never noticed any style at all in your story of the thermosaurus."

He smiled gratefully, and passed his hand over his face; a far-away expression came into his eyes, and he slowly began, hesitating, as though talking to himself:

Chapter 22

"It was high noon in the city of Antwerp. From slender steeples floated the mellow music of the Flemish bells, and in the spire of the great cathedral across the square the cracked chimes clashed discords until my ears ached.

"When the fiend in the cathedral had jerked the last tuneless clang from the chimes, I removed my fingers from my ears and sat down at one of the iron tables in the court. A waiter, with his face shaved blue, brought me a bottle of Rhine wine, a tumbler of cracked ice, and a siphon.

"'Does monsieur desire anything else?' he inquired.

"'Yes—the head of the cathedral bell-ringer; bring it with vinegar and potatoes,' I said, bitterly. Then I began to ponder on my great-aunt and the Crimson Diamond.

"The white walls of the Hôtel St. Antoine rose in a rectangle around the sunny court, casting long shadows across the basin of the fountain. The strip of blue overhead was cloudless. Sparrows twittered under the eaves the yellow awnings fluttered, the flowers swayed in the summer breeze, and the jet of the fountain splashed among the water-plants. On the sunny side of the piazza the tables were vacant; on the shady side I was lazily aware that the tables behind me were occupied, but I was indifferent as to their occupants, partly because I shunned all tourists, partly because I was thinking of my great-aunt.

"Most old ladies are eccentric, but there is a limit, and my great-aunt had overstepped it. I had believed her to be wealthy—she died bankrupt. Still, I knew there was one thing she did possess, and that

was the famous Crimson Diamond. Now, of course, you know who my great-aunt was.

"Excepting the Koh-i-noor and the Regent, this enormous and unique stone was, as everybody knows, the most valuable gem in existence. Any ordinary person would have placed that diamond in a safe-deposit. My great-aunt did nothing of the kind. She kept it in a small velvet bag, which she carried about her neck. She never took it off, but wore it dangling openly on her heavy silk gown.

"In this same bag she also carried dried catnip-leaves, of which she was inordinately fond. Nobody but myself, her only living relative, knew that the Crimson Diamond lay among the sprigs of catnip in the little velvet bag.

"'Harold,' she would say, 'do you think I'm a fool? If I place the Crimson Diamond in any safe-deposit vault in New York, somebody will steal it, sooner or later.' Then she would nibble a sprig of catnip and peer cunningly at me. I loathed the odor of catnip and she knew it. I also loathed cats. This also she knew, and of course surrounded herself with a dozen. Poor old lady! One day she was found dead in her bed in her apartments at the Waldorf. The doctor said she died from natural causes. The only other occupant of her sleeping-room was a cat. The cat fled when we broke open the door, and I heard that she was received and cherished by some eccentric people in a neighboring apartment.

"Now, although my great-aunt's death was due to purely natural causes, there was one very startling and disagreeable feature of the case. The velvet bag containing the Crimson Diamond had disappeared. Every inch of the apartment was searched, the floors torn up, the walls dismantled, but the Crimson Diamond had vanished. Chief of Police Conlon detailed four of his best men on the case, and, as I had nothing better to do, I enrolled myself as a volunteer. I also offered $25,000 reward for the recovery of the gem. All New York was agog.

"The case seemed hopeless enough, although there were five of us after the thief. McFarlane was in London, and had been for a month, but Scotland Yard could give him no help, and the last I heard of him he was roaming through Surrey after a man with a white spot in his hair. Harrison had gone to Paris. He kept writing me

that clews were plenty and the scent hot, but as Dennet, in Berlin, and Clancy, in Vienna, wrote me the same thing, I began to doubt these gentlemen's ability.

"'You say,' I answered Harrison, 'that the fellow is a Frenchman, and that he is now concealed in Paris; but Dennet writes me by the same mail that the thief is undoubtedly a German, and was seen yesterday in Berlin. To-day I received a letter from Clancy, assuring me that Vienna holds the culprit, and that he is an Austrian from Trieste. Now, for Heaven's sake,' I ended, 'let me alone and stop writing me letters until you have something to write about.'

"The night-clerk at the Waldorf had furnished us with our first clew. On the night of my aunt's death he had seen a tall, grave-faced man hurriedly leave the hotel. As the man passed the desk he removed his hat and mopped his forehead, and the night-clerk noticed that in the middle of his head there was a patch of hair as white as snow.

"We worked this clew for all it was worth, and, a month later, I received a cable despatch from Paris, saying that a man answering to the description of the Waldorf suspect had offered an enormous crimson diamond for sale to a jeweller in the Palais Royal. Unfortunately the fellow took fright and disappeared before the jeweller could send for the police, and since that time McFarlane in London, Harrison in Paris, Dennet in Berlin, and Clancy in Vienna had been chasing men with white patches on their hair until no gray-headed patriarch in Europe was free from suspicion. I myself had sleuthed it through England, France, Holland, and Belgium, and now I found myself in Antwerp at the Hôtel St. Antoine, without a clew that promised anything except another outrage on some respectable white-haired citizen. The case seemed hopeless enough, unless the thief tried again to sell the gem. Here was our only hope, for, unless he cut the stone into smaller ones, he had no more chance of selling it than he would have had if he had stolen the Venus of Milo and peddled her about the Rue de Seine. Even were he to cut up the stone, no respectable gem collector or jeweller would buy a crimson diamond without first notifying me; for although a few red stones are known to collectors, the color of the Crimson Diamond was absolutely unique, and there was little probability of an honest mistake.

"Thinking of all these things, I sat sipping my Rhine wine in the shadow of the yellow awnings. A large white cat came sauntering by and stopped in front of me to perform her toilet, until I wished she would go away. After a while she sat up, licked her whiskers, yawned once or twice, and was about to stroll on, when, catching sight of me, she stopped short and looked me squarely in the face. I returned the attention with a scowl, because I wished to discourage any advances towards social intercourse which she might contemplate; but after a while her steady gaze disconcerted me, and I turned to my Rhine wine. A few minutes later I looked up again. The cat was still eying me.

"'Now what the devil is the matter with the animal,' I muttered; 'does she recognize in me a relative?'

"'Perhaps,' observed a man at the next table.

"'What do you mean by that?' I demanded.

"'What I say,' replied the man at the next table.

"I looked him full in the face. He was old and bald and appeared weak-minded. His age protected his impudence. I turned my back on him. Then my eyes fell on the cat again. She was still gazing earnestly at me.

"Disgusted that she should take such pointed public notice of me, I wondered whether other people saw it; I wondered whether there was anything peculiar in my own personal appearance. How hard the creature stared! It was most embarrassing.

"'What has got into that cat?' I thought. 'It's sheer impudence. It's an intrusion, and I won't stand it!' The cat did not move. I tried to stare her out of countenance. It was useless. There was aggressive inquiry in her yellow eyes. A sensation of uneasiness began to steal over me—a sensation of embarrassment not unmixed with awe. All cats looked alike to me, and yet there was something about this one that bothered me—something that I could not explain to myself, but which began to occupy me.

"She looked familiar—this Antwerp cat. An odd sense of having seen her before, of having been well acquainted with her in former years, slowly settled in my mind, and, although I could never remember the time when I had not detested cats, I was almost convinced that my relations with this Antwerp tabby had once been

intimate if not cordial. I looked more closely at the animal. Then an idea struck me—an idea which persisted and took definite shape in spite of me. I strove to escape from it, to evade it, to stifle and smother it; an inward struggle ensued which brought the perspiration in beads upon my cheeks—a struggle short, sharp, decisive. It was useless—useless to try to put it from me—this idea so wretchedly bizarre, so grotesque and fantastic, so utterly inane—it was useless to deny that the cat bore a distinct resemblance to my great-aunt!

"I gazed at her in horror. What enormous eyes the creature had!

"'Blood is thicker than water,' said the man at the next table.

"'What does he mean by that?' I muttered, angrily, swallowing a tumbler of Rhine wine and seltzer. But I did not turn. What was the use?

"'Chattering old imbecile,' I added to myself, and struck a match, for my cigar was out; but, as I raised the match to relight it, I encountered the cat's eyes again. I could not enjoy my cigar with the animal staring at me, but I was justly indignant, and I did not intend to be routed. 'The idea! Forced to leave for a cat!' I sneered. 'We will see who will be the one to go!' I tried to give her a jet of seltzer from the siphon, but the bottle was too nearly empty to carry far. Then I attempted to lure her nearer, calling her in French, German, and English, but she did not stir. I did not know the Flemish for 'cat.'

"'She's got a name, and won't come,' I thought. 'Now, what under the sun can I call her?'

"'Aunty,' suggested the man at the next table.

"I sat perfectly still. Could that man have answered my thoughts?—for I had not spoken aloud. Of course not—it was a coincidence—but a very disgusting one.

"'Aunty,' I repeated, mechanically, 'aunty, aunty—good gracious, how horribly human that cat looks!' Then, somehow or other, Shakespeare's words crept into my head and I found myself repeating: 'The soul of my grandam might haply inhabit a bird; the soul of—nonsense!' I growled—'it isn't printed correctly! One might possibly say, speaking in poetical metaphor, that the soul of a bird might haply inhabit one's grandam—' I stopped short, flushing painfully. 'What awful rot!' I murmured, and lighted another cigar. The cat was still staring; the cigar went out. I grew more and more

nervous. 'What rot!' I repeated. 'Pythagoras must have been an ass, but I do believe there are plenty of asses alive to-day who swallow that sort of thing.'

"'Who knows?' sighed the man at the next table, and I sprang to my feet and wheeled about. But I only caught a glimpse of a pair of frayed coat-tails and a bald head vanishing into the dining-room. I sat down again, thoroughly indignant. A moment later the cat got up and went away.

Chapter 23

"Daylight was fading in the city of Antwerp. Down into the sea sank the sun, tinting the vast horizon with flakes of crimson, and touching with rich deep undertones the tossing waters of the Scheldt. Its glow fell like a rosy mantle over red-tiled roofs and meadows; and through the haze the spires of twenty churches pierced the air like sharp, gilded flames. To the west and south the green plains, over which the Spanish armies tramped so long ago, stretched away until they met the sky; the enchantment of the after-glow had turned old Antwerp into fairy-land; and sea and sky and plain were beautiful and vague as the night-mists floating in the moats below.

"Along the sea-wall from the Rubens Gate all Antwerp strolled, and chattered, and flirted, and sipped their Flemish wines from slender Flemish glasses, or gossiped over krugs of foaming beer.

"From the Scheldt came the cries of sailors, the creaking of cordage, and the puff! puff! of the ferry-boats. On the bastions of the fortress opposite, a bugler was standing. Twice the mellow notes of the bugle came faintly over the water, then a great gun thundered from the ramparts, and the Belgian flag fluttered along the lanyards to the ground.

"I leaned listlessly on the sea-wall and looked down at the Scheldt below. A battery of artillery was embarking for the fortress. The tublike transport lay hissing and whistling in the slip, and the stamping of horses, the rumbling of gun and caisson, and the sharp cries of the officers came plainly to the ear.

"When the last caisson was aboard and stowed, and the last trooper had sprung jingling to the deck, the transport puffed out into

the Scheldt, and I turned away through the throng of promenaders; and found a little table on the terrace, just outside of the pretty café. And as I sat down I became aware of a girl at the next table—a girl all in white—the most ravishingly and distractingly pretty girl that I had ever seen. In the agitation of the moment I forgot my name, my fortune, my aunt, and the Crimson Diamond—all these I forgot in a purely human impulse to see clearly; and to that end I removed my monocle from my left eye. Some moments later I came to myself and feebly replaced it. It was too late; the mischief was done. I was not aware at first of the exact state of my feelings—for I had never been in love more than three or four times in all my life—but I did know that at her request I would have been proud to stand on my head, or turn a flip-flap into the Scheldt.

"I did not stare at her, but I managed to see her most of the time when her eyes were in another direction. I found myself drinking something which a waiter brought, presumably upon an order which I did not remember having given. Later I noticed that it was a loathsome drink which the Belgians call 'American grog,' but I swallowed it and lighted a cigarette. As the fragrant cloud rose in the air, a voice, which I recognized with a chill, broke, into my dream of enchantment. Could *he* have been there all the while—there sitting beside that vision in white? His hat was off, and the ocean-breezes whispered about his bald head. His frayed coat-tails were folded carefully over his knees, and between the thumb and forefinger of his left hand he balanced a bad cigar. He looked at me in a mildly cheerful way, and said, 'I know now.'

"'Know what?' I asked, thinking it better to humor him, for I was convinced that he was mad.

"'I know why cats bite.'

"This was startling. I hadn't an idea what to say.

"'I know why,' he repeated; 'can you guess why?' There was a covert tone of triumph in his voice and he smiled encouragement. 'Come, try and guess,' he urged.

"I told him that I was unequal to problems.

"'Listen, young man,' he continued, folding his coat-tails closely about his legs—'try to reason it out: why should cats bite? Don't you know? I do.'

"He looked at me anxiously.

"'You take no interest in this problem?' he demanded.

"'Oh yes.'

"'Then why do you not ask me why?' he said, looking vaguely disappointed.

"'Well,' I said, in desperation, 'why do cats bite?—hang it all!' I thought, 'it's like a burned-cork show, and I'm Mr. Bones and he's Tambo!'

"Then he smiled gently. 'Young man,' he said, 'cats bite because they feed on catnip. I have reasoned it out.'

"I stared at him in blank astonishment. Was this benevolent-looking old party poking fun at me? Was he paying me up for the morning's snub? Was he a malignant and revengeful old party, or was he merely feeble-minded? Who might he be? What was he doing here in Antwerp—what was he doing now?—for the bald one had turned familiarly to the beautiful girl in white.

"'Wilhelmina,' he said, 'do you feel chilly?' The girl shook her head.

"'Not in the least, papa.'

"'Her father!' I thought—'her father!' Thank God she did not say 'popper'!

"'I have been to the Zoo to-day,' announced the bald one, turning towards me.

"'Ah, indeed,' I observed; 'er—I trust you enjoyed it.'

"'I have been contemplating the apes,' he continued, dreamily. 'Yes, contemplating the apes.'

"I tried to look interested.

"'Yes, the apes,' he murmured, fixing his mild eyes on me. Then he leaned towards me confidentially and whispered, 'Can you tell me what a monkey thinks?'

"'I cannot,' I replied, sharply.

"'Ah,' he sighed, sinking back in his chair, and patting the slender hand of the girl beside him—'ah, who can tell what a monkey thinks?' His gentle face lulled my suspicions, and I replied, very gravely:

"'Who can tell whether they think at all?'

"'True, true! Who can tell whether they think at all; and if they do think, ah! who can tell what they think?'

"'But,' I began, 'if you can't tell whether they think at all, what's the use of trying to conjecture what they *would* think if they *did* think?'

"He raised his hand in deprecation. 'Ah, it is exactly that which is of such absorbing interest—exactly that! It is the abstruseness of the proposition which stimulates research—which stirs profoundly the brain of the thinking world. The question is of vital and instant importance. Possibly you have already formed an opinion.'

"I admitted that I had thought but little on the subject.

"'I doubt,' he continued, swathing his knees in his coat-tails—'I doubt whether you have given much attention to the subject lately discussed by the Boston Dodo Society of Pythagorean Research.'

"'I am not sure,' I said, politely, 'that I recall that particular discussion. May I ask what was the question brought up?'

"'The Felis domestica question.'

"'Ah, that must indeed be interesting! And—er—what may be the Felis do—do—'

"'Domestica—not dodo. Felis domestica, the common or garden cat.'

"'Indeed,' I murmured.

"'You are not listening,' he said.

"I only half heard him. I could not turn my eyes from his daughter's face.

"'Cat!' shouted the bald one, and I almost leaped from my chair. 'Are you deaf?' he inquired, sympathetically.

"'No—oh no!' I replied, coloring with confusion; 'you were—pardon me—you were—er—speaking of the dodo. Extraordinary bird that—'

"'I was not discussing the dodo,' he sighed. 'I was speaking of cats.'

"'Of course,' I said.

"'The question is,' he continued, twisting his frayed coat-tails into a sort of rope—'the question is, how are we to ameliorate the present condition and social status of our domestic cats?'

"'Feed 'em,' I suggested.

"He raised both hands. They were eloquent with patient expostulation. 'I mean their spiritual condition,' he said.

"I nodded, but my eyes reverted to that exquisite face. She sat silent, her eyes fixed on the waning flecks of color in the western sky.

"'Yes,' repeated the bald one, 'the spiritual welfare of our domestic cats.'

"'Toms and tabbies?' I murmured.

"'Exactly,' he said, tying a large knot in his coat-tails.

"'You will ruin your coat,' I observed.

"'Papa!' exclaimed the girl, turning in dismay, as that gentleman gave a guilty start, 'stop it at once!'

"He smiled apologetically and made a feeble attempt to conceal his coat-tails.

"'My dear,' he said, with gentle deprecation, 'I am so absent-minded—I always do it in the heat of argument.'

"The girl rose, and, bending over her untidy parent, deftly untied the knot in his flapping coat. When he was disentangled, she sat down and said, with a ghost of a smile, 'He is so very absent-minded.'

"'Your father is evidently a great student,' I ventured, pleasantly. How I pitied her, tied to this old lunatic!

"'Yes, he is a great student,' she said, quietly.

"'I am,' he murmured; 'that's what makes me so absent-minded. I often go to bed and forget to sleep.' Then, looking at me, he asked me my name, adding, with a bow, that his name was P. Royal Wyeth, Professor of Pythagorean Research and Abstruse Paradox.

"'My first name is Penny—named after Professor Penny, of Harvard,' he said; 'but I seldom use my first name in connection with my second, as the combination suggests a household remedy of penetrating odor.'

"'My name is Kensett,' I said, 'Harold Kensett, of New York.'

"'Student?'

"'Er—a little.'

"'Student of diamonds?'

"I smiled. 'Oh, I see you know who my great-aunt was,' I said.

"'I know her,' he said.

"'Ah—perhaps you are unaware that my great-aunt is not now living.'

"'I know her,' he repeated, obstinately.

"I bowed. What a crank he was!

"'What do you study? You don't fiddle away all your time, do you?' he asked.

"Now that was just what I did, but I was not pleased to have Miss Wyeth know it. Although my time was chiefly spent in killing time, I had once, in a fit of energy, succeeded in writing some verses 'To a Tomtit,' so I evaded a humiliating confession by saying that I had done a little work in ornithology.

"'Good!' cried the professor, beaming all over. 'I knew you were a fellow-scientist. Possibly you are a brother-member of the Boston Dodo Society of Pythagorean Research. Are you a dodo?'

"I shook my head. 'No, I am not a dodo.'

"'Only a jay?'

"'A—what?' I said, angrily.

"'A jay. We call the members of the Junior Ornithological Jay Society of New York, jays, just as we refer to ourselves as dodos. Are you not even a jay?'

"'I am not,' I said, watching him suspiciously.

"'I must convert you, I see,' said the professor, smiling.

"'I'm afraid I do not approve of Pythagorean research,' I began, but the beautiful Miss Wyeth turned to me very seriously, and, looking me frankly in the eyes, said:

"'I trust you will be open to conviction.'

"'Good Lord!' I thought. 'Can she be another lunatic?' I looked at her steadily. What a little beauty she was! She also, then, belonged to the Pythagoreans—a sect I despised. Everybody knows all about the Pythagorean craze, its rise in Boston, its rapid spread, and its subsequent consolidation with mental and Christian science, theosophy, hypnotism, the Salvation Army, the Shakers, the Dunkards, and the mind-cure cult, upon a business basis. I had hitherto regarded all Pythagoreans with the same scornful indifference which I accorded to the faith-curists; being a member of no particular church, I was scarcely prepared to take any of them seriously. Least of all did I approve of the 'business basis,' and I looked very much askance indeed at the 'Scientific and Religious Trust Company,' duly incorporated and generally known as the Pythagorean Trust, which, consolidating with mind-curists, faith-curists, and other flourishing salvation syndicates, actually claimed a

place among ordinary trusts, and at the same time pretended to a control over man's future life. No, I could never listen—I was ashamed of even entertaining the notion, and I shook my head.

"'No, Miss Wyeth, I am afraid I do not care to listen to any reasoning on this subject.'

"'Don't you believe in Pythagoras?' demanded the professor, subduing his excitement with difficulty, and adding another knot to his coat-tails.

"'No,' I said, 'I do not.'

"'How do you know you don't?' inquired the professor.

"'Because,' I said, firmly, 'it is nonsense to say that the soul of a human being can inhabit a hen!'

"'Put it in a more simplified form!' insisted the professor. 'Do you believe that the soul of a hen can inhabit a human being?'

"'No, I don't!'

"'Did you ever hear of a hen-pecked man?' cried the professor, his voice ending in a shout.

"I nodded, intensely annoyed.

"'Will you listen to reason, then?' he continued, eagerly.

"'No,' I began, but I caught Miss Wyeth's blue eyes fixed on mine with an expression so sad, so sweetly appealing, that I faltered.

"'Yes, I will listen,' I said, faintly.

"'Will you become my pupil?' insisted the professor.

"I was shocked to find myself wavering, but my eyes were looking into hers, and I could not disobey what I read there. The longer I looked the greater inclination I felt to waver. I saw that I was going to give in, and, strangest of all, my conscience did not trouble me. I felt it coming—a sort of mild exhilaration took possession of me. For the first time in my life I became reckless—I even gloried in my recklessness.

"'Yes, yes,' I cried, leaning eagerly across the table, 'I shall be glad—delighted! Will you take me as your pupil?' My single eye-glass fell from its position unheeded. 'Take me! Oh, will you take me?' I cried. Instead of answering, the professor blinked rapidly at me for a moment. I imagined his eyes had grown bigger, and were assuming a greenish tinge. The corners of his mouth began to quiver, emitting queer, caressing little noises, and he rapidly added knot after knot to

his twitching coat-tails. Suddenly he bent forward across the table until his nose almost touched mine. The pupils of his eyes expanded, the iris assuming a beautiful, changing, golden-green tinge, and his coat-tails switched violently. Then he began to mew.

"I strove to rouse myself from my paralysis—I tried to shrink back, for I felt the end of his cold nose touch mine. I could not move. The cry of terror died in my straining throat, my hands tightened convulsively; I was incapable of speech or motion. At the same time my brain became wonderfully clear. I began to remember everything that had ever happened to me—everything that I had ever done or said. I even remembered things that I had neither done nor said; I recalled distinctly much that had never happened. How fresh and strong my memory! The past was like a mirror, crystal clear, and there, in glorious tints and hues, the scenes of my childhood grew and glowed and faded, and gave place to newer and more splendid scenes. For a moment the episode of the cat at the Hôtel St. Antoine flashed across my mind. When it vanished a chilly stupor slowly clouded my brain; the scenes, the memories, the brilliant colors, faded, leaving me enveloped in a gray vapor, through which the two great eyes of the professor twinkled with a murky light. A peculiar longing stirred me—a strange yearning for something, I knew not what—but, oh! how I longed and yearned for it! Slowly this indefinite, incomprehensible longing became a living pain. Ah, how I suffered, and how the vapors seemed to crowd around me! Then, as at a great distance, I heard her voice, sweet, imperative:

"'Mew!' she said.

"For a moment I seemed to see the interior of my own skull, lighted as by a flash of fire; the rolling eyeballs, veined in scarlet, the glistening muscles quivering along the jaw, the humid masses of the convoluted brain; then awful darkness—a darkness almost tangible—an utter blackness, through which now seemed to creep a thin, silver thread, like a river crawling across a world—like a thought gliding to the brain—like a song, a thin, sharp song which some distant voice was singing—which I was singing.

"And I knew that I was mewing!

"I threw myself back in my chair and mewed with all my heart. Oh, that heavy load which was lifted from my breast! How good, how

satisfying it was to mew! And how I did miaul and yowl!

"I gave myself up to it, heart and soul; my whole being thrilled with the passionate outpourings of a spirit freed. My voice trembled in the upper bars of a feline love-song, quavered, descended, swelling again into an intimation that I brooked no rival, and ended with a magnificent crescendo.

"I finished, somewhat abashed, and glanced askance at the professor and his daughter, but the one sat nonchalantly disentangling his coat-tails, and the other was apparently absorbed in the distant landscape. Evidently they did not consider me ridiculous. Flushing painfully, I turned in my chair to see how my grewsome solo had affected the people on the terrace. Nobody even looked at me. This, however, gave me little comfort, for, as I began to realize what I had done, my mortification and rage knew no bounds. I was ready to die of shame. What on earth had induced me to mew? I looked wildly about for escape—I would leap up—rush home to bury my burning face in my pillows, and, later, in the friendly cabin of a homeward-bound steamer. I would fly—fly at once! Woe to the man who blocked my way! I started to my feet, but at that moment I caught Miss Wyeth's eyes fixed on mine.

"'Don't go,' she said.

"What in Heaven's name lay in those blue eyes? I slowly sank back into my chair.

"Then the professor spoke: 'Wilhelmina, I have just received a despatch.'

"'Where from, papa?'

"'From India. I'm going at once.'

"She nodded her head, without turning her eyes from the sea. 'Is it important, papa?'

"'I should say so. The cashier of the local trust has compromised an astral body, and has squandered on her all our funds, including a lot of first mortgages on Nirvana. I suppose he's been dabbling in futures and is short in his accounts. I sha'n't be gone long.'

"'Then, good-night, papa,' she said, kissing him; 'try to be back by eleven.' I sat stupidly staring at them.

"'Oh, it's only to Bombay—I sha'n't go to Thibet to-night—good-night, my dear,' said the professor.

"Then a singular thing occurred. The professor had at last succeeded in disentangling his coat-tails, and now, jamming his hat over his ears, and waving his arms with a batlike motion, he climbed upon the seat of his chair and ejaculated the word 'Presto!' Then I found my voice.

"'Stop him!' I cried, in terror.

"'Presto! Presto!' shouted the professor, balancing himself on the edge of his chair and waving his arms majestically, as if preparing for a sudden flight across the Scheldt; and, firmly convinced that he not only meditated it, but was perfectly capable of attempting it, I covered my eyes with my hands.

"'Are you ill, Mr. Kensett?' asked the girl, quietly.

"I raised my head indignantly. 'Not at all, Miss Wyeth, only I'll bid you good-evening, for this is the nineteenth century, and I'm a Christian.'

"'So am I,' she said. 'So is my father.'

"'The devil he is,' I thought.

"Her next words made me jump.

"'Please do not be profane, Mr. Kensett.'

"How did she know I was profane? I had not spoken a word! Could it be possible she was able to read my thoughts? This was too much, and I rose.

"'I have the honor to bid you good-evening,' I began, and reluctantly turned to include the professor, expecting to see that gentleman balancing himself on his chair. The professor's chair was empty.

"'Oh,' said the girl, smiling, 'my father has gone.'

"'Gone! Where?'

"'To—to India, I believe.'

"I sank helplessly into my own chair.

"'I do not think he will stay very long—he promised to return by eleven,' she said, timidly.

"I tried to realize the purport of it all. 'Gone to India? Gone! How? On a broomstick? Good Heavens,' I murmured, 'am I insane?'

"'Perfectly,' she said, 'and I am tired; you may take me back to the hotel.'

"I scarcely heard her; I was feebly attempting to gather up my numbed wits. Slowly I began to comprehend the situation, to review the startling and humiliating events of the day. At noon, in the court of the Hôtel St. Antoine, I had been annoyed by a man and a cat. I had retired to my own room and had slept until dinner. In the evening I met two tourists on the sea-wall promenade. I had been beguiled into conversation—yes, into intimacy with these two tourists! I had had the intention of embracing the faith of Pythagoras! Then I had mewed like a cat with all the strength of my lungs. Now the male tourist vanishes—and leaves me in charge of the female tourist, alone and at night in a strange city! And now the female tourist proposes that I take her home!

"With a remnant of self-possession I groped for my eye-glass, seized it, screwed it firmly into my eye, and looked long and earnestly at the girl. As I looked, my eyes softened, my monacle dropped, and I forgot everything in the beauty and purity of the face before me. My heart began to beat against my stiff, white waistcoat. Had I dared—yes, dared to think of this wondrous little beauty as a female tourist? Her pale, sweet face, turned towards the sea, seemed to cast a spell upon the night. How loud my heart was beating! The yellow moon floated, half dipping in the sea, flooding land and water with enchanted lights. Wind and wave seemed to feel the spell of her eyes, for the breeze died away, the heaving Scheldt tossed noiselessly, and the dark Dutch luggers swung idly on the tide with every sail adroop.

"A sudden hush fell over land and water, the voices on the promenade were stilled; little by little the shadowy throng, the terrace, the sea itself vanished, and I only saw her face, shadowed against the moon.

"It seemed as if I had drifted miles above the earth, through all space and eternity, and there was naught between me and high heaven but that white face. Ah, how I loved her! I knew it—I never doubted it. Could years of passionate adoration touch her heart—her little heart, now beating so calmly with no thought of love to startle it from its quiet and send it fluttering against the gentle breast? In her lap her clasped hands tightened—her eyelids drooped as though some pleasant thought was passing. I saw the color dye her

temples, I saw the blue eyes turn, half frightened, to my own, I saw—and I knew she had read my thoughts. Then we both rose, side by side, and she was weeping softly, yet for my life I dared not speak. She turned away, touching her eyes with a bit of lace, and I sprang to her side and offered her my arm.

"'You cannot go back alone,' I said.

"She did not take my arm.

"'Do you hate me, Miss Wyeth?'

"'I am very tired,' she said; 'I must go home.'

"'You cannot go alone.'

"'I do not care to accept your escort.'

"'Then—you send me away?'

"'No,' she said, in a hard voice. 'You can come if you like.' So I humbly attended her to the Hôtel St. Antoine.

Chapter 24

"As we reached the Place Verte and turned into the court of the hotel, the sound of the midnight bells swept over the city, and a horse-car jingled slowly by on its last trip to the railroad station.

"We passed the fountain, bubbling and splashing in the moonlit court, and, crossing the square, entered the southern wing of the hotel. At the foot of the stairway she leaned for an instant against the banisters.

"'I am afraid we have walked too fast,' I said.

"She turned to me coldly. 'No—conventionalities must be observed. You were quite right in escaping as soon as possible.'

"'But,' I protested, 'I assure you—'

"She gave a little movement of impatience. 'Don't,' she said, 'you tire me—conventionalities tire me. Be satisfied—nobody has seen you.'

"'You are cruel,' I said, in a low voice—'what do you think I care for conventionalities?'

"'You care everything—you care what people think, and you try to do what they say is good form. You never did such an original thing in your life as you have just done.'

"'You read my thoughts,' I exclaimed, bitterly. 'It is not fair—'

"'Fair or not, I know what you consider me—ill-bred, common, pleased with any sort of attention. Oh! why should I waste one word—one thought on you?'

"'Miss Wyeth—' I began, but she interrupted me.

"'Would you dare tell me what you think of me?—Would you dare tell me what you think of my father?'

"I was silent. She turned and mounted two steps of the stairway, then faced me again.

"'Do you think it was for my own pleasure that I permitted myself to be left alone with you? Do you imagine that I am flattered by your attention?—do you venture to think I ever could be? How dared you think what you did think there on the sea-wall?'

"'I cannot help my thoughts!' I replied.

"'You turned on me like a tiger when you awoke from your trance. Do you really suppose that you mewed? Are you not aware that my father hypnotized you?'

"'No—I did not know it,' I said. The hot blood tingled in my finger-tips, and I looked angrily at her.

"'Why do you imagine that I waste my time on you?' she said. 'Your vanity has answered that question—now let your intelligence answer it. I am a Pythagorean; I have been chosen to bring in a convert, and you were the convert selected for me by the Mahatmas of the Consolidated Trust Company. I have followed you from New York to Antwerp, as I was bidden, but now my courage fails, and I shrink from fulfilling my mission, knowing you to be the type of man you are. If I could give it up—if I could only go away—never, never again to see you! Ah, I fear they will not permit it!—until my mission is accomplished. Why was I chosen—I, with a woman's heart and a woman's pride. I—I hate you!'

"'I love you,' I said, slowly.

"She paled and looked away.

"'Answer me,' I said.

"Her wide, blue eyes turned back again, and I held them with mine. At last she slowly drew a long-stemmed rose from the bunch at her belt, turned, and mounted the shadowy staircase. For a moment I thought I saw her pause on the landing above, but the moonlight was uncertain. After waiting for a long time in vain, I moved away, and in going raised my hand to my face, but I stopped short, and my heart stopped too, for a moment. In my hand I held a long-stemmed rose.

"With my brain in a whirl I crept across the court and mounted the stairs to my room. Hour after hour I walked the floor, slowly at first, then more rapidly, but it brought no calm to the fierce tumult of my

thoughts, and at last I dropped into a chair before the empty fireplace, burying my head in my hands.

"Uncertain, shocked, and deadly weary, I tried to think—I strove to bring order out of the chaos in my brain, but I only sat staring at the long-stemmed rose. Slowly I began to take a vague pleasure in its heavy perfume, and once I crushed a leaf between my palms, and, bending over, drank in the fragrance.

"Twice my lamp flickered and went out, and twice, treading softly, I crossed the room to relight it. Twice I threw open the door, thinking that I heard some sound without. How close the air was!—how heavy and hot! And what was that strange, subtle odor which had insensibly filled the room? It grew stronger and more penetrating, and I began to dislike it, and to escape it I buried my nose in the half-opened rose. Horror! The odor came from the rose—and the rose itself was no longer a rose—not even a flower now—it was only a bunch of catnip; and I dashed it to the floor and ground it under my heel.

"'Mountebank!' I cried, in a rage. My anger grew cold—and I shivered, drawn perforce to the curtained window. Something was there, outside. I could not hear it, for it made no sound, but I knew it was there, watching me. What was it? The damp hair stirred on my head. I touched the heavy curtains. Whatever was outside them sprang up, tore at the window, and then rushed away.

"Feeling very shaky, I crept to the window, opened it, and leaned out. The night was calm. I heard the fountain splashing in the moonlight and the sea-winds soughing through the palms. Then I closed the window and turned back into the room; and as I stood there a sudden breeze, which could not have come from without, blew sharply in my face, extinguishing the candle and sending the long curtains bellying out into the room. The lamp on the table flashed and smoked and sputtered; the room was littered with flying papers and catnip leaves. Then the strange wind died away, and somewhere in the night a cat snarled.

"I turned desperately to my trunk and flung it open. Into it I threw everything I owned, pell-mell, closed the lid, locked it, and, seizing my mackintosh and travelling-bag, ran down the stairs, crossed the

court, and entered the night-office of the hotel. There I called up the sleepy clerk, settled my reckoning, and sent a porter for a cab.

"'Now,' I said, 'what time does the next train leave?'

"'The next train for where?'

"'Anywhere!'

"The clerk locked the safe, and, carefully keeping the desk between himself and me, motioned the office-boy to look at the time-tables.

"'Next train, 2.10. Brussels—Paris,' read the boy.

"At that moment the cab rattled up by the curbstone, and I sprang in while the porter tossed my traps on top. Away we bumped over the stony pavement, past street after street lighted dimly by tall gas-lamps, and alley after alley brilliant with the glare of villanous all-night café-concerts, and then, turning, we rumbled past the Circus and the Eldorado, and at last stopped with a jolt before the Brussels station.

"I had not a moment to lose. 'Paris!' I cried—'first-class!' and, pocketing the book of coupons, hurried across the platform to where the Brussels train lay. A guard came running up, flung open the door of a first-class carriage, slammed and locked it after I had jumped in, and the long train glided from the arched station out into the starlit morning.

"I was all alone in the compartment. The wretched lamp in the roof flickered dimly, scarcely lighting the stuffy box. I could not see to read my time-table, so I wrapped my legs in the travelling-rug and lay back, staring out into the misty morning. Trees, walls, telegraph-poles flashed past, and the cinders drove in showers against the rattling windows. I slept at times, fitfully, and once, springing up, peered sharply at the opposite seat, possessed with the idea that somebody was there.

"When the train reached Brussels I was sound asleep, and the guard awoke me with difficulty.

"'Breakfast, sir?' he asked.

"'Anything,' I sighed, and stepped out to the platform, rubbing my legs and shivering. The other passengers were already breakfasting in the station café, and I joined them and managed to swallow a cup of coffee and a roll.

"The morning broke gray and cloudy, and I bundled myself into my mackintosh for a tramp along the platform. Up and down I stamped, puffing a cigar, and digging my hands deep in my pockets, while the other passengers huddled into the warmer compartments of the train or stood watching the luggage being lifted into the forward mail-carriage. The wait was very long; the hands of the great clock pointed to six, and still the train lay motionless along the platform. I approached a guard and asked him whether anything was wrong.

"'Accident on the line,' he replied; 'monsieur had better go to his compartment and try to sleep, for we may be delayed until noon.'

"I followed the guard's advice, and, crawling into my corner, wrapped myself in the rug and lay back watching the rain-drops spattering along the window-sill. At noon the train had not moved, and I lunched in the compartment. At four o'clock in the afternoon the station-master came hurrying along the platform, crying, 'Montez! montez! messieurs, s'il vous plaît'—and the train steamed out of the station and whirled away through the flat, treeless Belgian plains. At times I dozed, but the shaking of the car always awoke me, and I would sit blinking out at the endless stretch of plain, until a sudden flurry of rain blotted the landscape from my eyes. At last a long, shrill whistle from the engine, a jolt, a series of bumps, and an apparition of red trousers and bayonets warned me that we had arrived at the French frontier. I turned out with the others, and opened my valise for inspection, but the customs officials merely chalked it, without examination, and I hurried back to my compartment amid the shouting of guards and the clanging of station bells. Again I found that I was alone in the compartment, so I smoked a cigarette, thanked Heaven, and fell into a dreamless sleep.

"How long I slept I do not know, but when I awoke the train was roaring through a tunnel. When again it flashed out into the open country I peered through the grimy, rain-stained window and saw that the storm had ceased and stars were twinkling in the sky. I stretched my legs, yawned, pushed my travelling-cap back from my forehead, and, stumbling to my feet, walked up and down the compartment until my cramped muscles were relieved. Then I sat down again, and, lighting a cigar, puffed great rings and clouds of fragrant smoke across the aisle.

"The train was flying; the cars lurched and shook, and the windows rattled accompaniment to the creaking panels. The smoke from my cigar dimmed the lamp in the ceiling and hid the opposite seat from view. How it curled and writhed in the corners, now eddying upward, now floating across the aisle like a veil! I lounged back in my cushioned seat, watching it with interest. What queer shapes it took! How thick it was becoming!—how strangely luminous! Now it had filled the whole compartment, puff after puff crowding upward, waving, wavering, clouding the windows, and blotting the lamp from sight. It was most interesting. I had never before smoked such a cigar. What an extraordinary brand! I examined the end, flicking the ashes away. The cigar was out. Fumbling for a match to relight it, my eyes fell on the drifting smoke-curtain which swayed across the corner opposite. It seemed almost tangible. How like a real curtain it hung, gray, impenetrable! A man might hide behind it. Then an idea came into my head, and it persisted until my uneasiness amounted to a vague terror. I tried to fight it off—I strove to resist—but the conviction slowly settled upon me that something was behind that smoke-veil—something which had entered the compartment while I slept.

"'It can't be,' I muttered, my eyes fixed on the misty drapery; 'the train has not stopped.'

"The car creaked and trembled. I sprang to my feet and swept my arm through the veil of smoke. Then my hair rose on my head. For my hand touched another hand, and my eyes had met two other eyes.

"I heard a voice in the gloom, low and sweet, calling me by name; I saw the eyes again, tender and blue; soft fingers touched my own.

"'Are you afraid?' she said.

"My heart began to beat again, and my face warmed with returning blood.

"'It is only I,' she said, gently.

"I seemed to hear my own voice speaking as if at a great distance, 'You here—alone?'

"'How cruel of you!' she faltered; 'I am not alone.' At the same instant my eyes fell upon the professor, calmly seated by the farther window. His hands were thrust into the folds of a corded and

tasselled dressing-gown, from beneath which peeped two enormous feet encased in carpet slippers. Upon his head towered a yellow night-cap. He did not pay the slightest attention to either me or his daughter, and, except for the lighted cigar which he kept shifting between his lips, he might have been taken for a wax dummy.

"Then I began to speak, feebly, hesitating like a child.

"'How did you come into this compartment? You—you do not possess wings, I suppose? You could not have been here all the time. Will you explain—explain to me? See, I ask you very humbly, for I do not understand. This is the nineteenth century, and these things don't fit in. I'm wearing a Dunlap hat—I've got a copy of the New York *Herald* in my bag—President Roosevelt is alive, and everything is so very unromantic in the world! Is this real magic? Perhaps I'm filled with hallucinations. Perhaps I'm asleep and dreaming. Perhaps you are not really here—nor I—nor anybody, nor anything!'

"The train plunged into a tunnel, and when again it dashed out from the other end the cold wind blew furiously in my face from the farther window. It was wide open; the professor was gone.

"'Papa has changed to another compartment,' she said, quietly. 'I think perhaps you were beginning to bore him.'

"Her eyes met mine and she smiled.

"'Are you very much bewildered?'

"I looked at her in silence. She sat very quietly, her hands clasped above her knee, her curly hair glittering to her girdle. A long robe, almost silvery in the twilight, clung to her young figure; her bare feet were thrust deep into a pair of shimmering Eastern slippers.

"'When you fled,' she sighed, 'I was asleep and there was no time to lose. I barely had a moment to go to Bombay, to find papa, and return in time to join you. This is an East-Indian costume.'

"Still I was silent.

"'Are you shocked?' she asked, simply.

"'No,' I replied, in a dull voice, 'I'm past that.'

"'You are very rude,' she said, with the tears starting to her eyes.

"'I do not mean to be. I only wish to go away—away somewhere and find out what my name is.'

"'Your name is Harold Kensett.'

"'Are you sure?' I asked, eagerly.

"'Yes—what troubles you?'

"'Is everything plain to you? Are you a sort of prophet and second-sight medium? Is nothing hidden from you?' I asked.

"'Nothing,' she faltered. My head ached and I clasped it in my hand.

"A sudden change came over her. 'I am human—believe me!' she said, with piteous eagerness. 'Indeed, I do not seem strange to those who understand. You wonder, because you left me at midnight in Antwerp and you wake to find me here. If, because I find myself reincarnated, endowed with senses and capabilities which few at present possess—if I am so made, why should it seem strange? It is all so natural to me. If I appear to you—'

"'Appear?'

"'Yes—'

"'Wilhelmina!' I cried; 'can you vanish?'

"'Yes,' she murmured; 'does it seem to you unmaidenly?'

"'Great Heaven!' I groaned.

"'Don't!' she cried, with tears in her voice—'oh, please don't! Help me to bear it! If you only knew how awful it is to be different from other girls—how mortifying it is to me to be able to vanish—oh, how I hate and detest it all!'

"'Don't cry,' I said, looking at her pityingly.

"'Oh, dear me!' she sobbed. 'You shudder at the sight of me because I can vanish.'

"'I don't!' I cried.

"'Yes, you do! You abhor me—you shrink away! Oh, why did I ever see you?—why did you ever come into my life?—what have I done in ages past, that now, reborn, I suffer cruelly—cruelly?'

"'What do you mean?' I whispered. My voice trembled with happiness.

"'I?—nothing; but you think me a fabled monster.'

"'Wilhelmina—my sweet Wilhelmina,' I said, 'I don't think you a fabled monster. I love you; see—see—I am at your feet; listen to me, my darling—'

"She turned her blue eyes to mine. I saw tears sparkling on the curved lashes.

"'Wilhelmina, I love you,' I said again.

"Slowly she raised her hands to my head and held it a moment, looking at me strangely. Then her face grew nearer to my own, her glittering hair fell over my shoulders, her lips rested on mine.

"In that long, sweet kiss the beating of her heart answered mine, and I learned a thousand truths, wonderful, mysterious, splendid; but when our lips fell apart, the memory of what I learned departed also.

"'It was so very simple and beautiful,' she sighed, 'and I—I never saw it. But the Mahatmas knew—ah, they knew that my mission could only be accomplished through love.'

"'And it is,' I whispered, 'for you shall teach me—me, your husband.'

"'And—and you will not be impatient? You will try to believe?'

"'I will believe what you tell me, my sweetheart.'

"'Even about—cats?'

"Before I could reply the farther window opened and a yellow night-cap, followed by the professor, entered from somewhere without. Wilhelmina sank back on her sofa, but the professor needed not to be told, and we both knew he was already busily reading our thoughts.

"For a moment there was dead silence—long enough for the professor to grasp the full significance of what had passed. Then he uttered a single exclamation, 'Oh!'

"After a while, however, he looked at me for the first time that evening, saying, 'Congratulate you, Mr. Kensett, I'm sure,' tied several knots in the cord of his dressing-gown, lighted a cigar, and paid no further attention to either of us. Some moments later he opened the window again and disappeared. I looked across the aisle at Wilhelmina.

"'You may come over beside me,' she said, shyly.

Chapter 25

"It was nearly ten o'clock and our train was rapidly approaching Paris. We passed village after village wrapped in mist, station after station hung with twinkling red and blue and yellow lanterns, then sped on again with the echo of the switch-bells ringing in our ears.

"When at length the train slowed up and stopped, I opened the window and looked out upon a long, wet platform, shining under the electric lights.

"A guard came running by, throwing open the doors of each compartment, and crying, 'Paris next! Tickets, if you please.'

"I handed him my book of coupons, from which he tore several and handed it back. Then he lifted his lantern and peered into the compartment, saying, 'Is monsieur alone?'

"I turned to Wilhelmina.

"'He wants your ticket—give it to me.'

"'What's that?' demanded the guard.

"I looked anxiously at Wilhelmina.

"'If your father has the tickets—' I began, but was interrupted by the guard, who snapped:

"'Monsieur will give himself the trouble to remember that I do not understand English.'

"'Keep quiet!' I said, sharply, in French. 'I am not speaking to you.'

"The guard stared stupidly at me, then, at my luggage, and finally, entering the car, knelt down and peered under the seats. Presently he got up, very red in the face, and went out slamming the door. He had not paid the slightest attention to Wilhelmina, but I distinctly heard him say, 'Only Englishmen and idiots talk to themselves!'

"'Wilhelmina,' I faltered, 'do you mean to say that that guard could not see you?'

"She began to look so serious again that I merely added, 'Never mind, I don't care whether you are invisible or not, dearest.'

"'I am not invisible to you,' she said; 'why should you care?'

"A great noise of bells and whistles drowned our voices, and, amid the whirring of switch-bells, the hissing of steam, and the cries of 'Paris! All out!' our train glided into the station.

"It was the professor who opened the door of our carriage. There he stood, calmly adjusting his yellow night-cap and drawing his dressing-gown closer with the corded tassels.

"'Where have you been?' I asked.

"'On the engine.'

"'*In* the engine, I suppose you mean,' I said.

"'No, I don't; I mean *on* the engine—on the pilot. It was very refreshing. Where are we going now?'

"'Do you know Paris?' asked Wilhelmina, turning to me.

"'Yes. I think your father had better take you to the Hôtel Normandie on the Rue de l'Échelle—'

"'But you must stay there, too!'

"'Of course—if you wish—'

"She laughed nervously.

"'Don't you see that my father and I could not take rooms—now? You must engage three rooms for yourself.'

"'Why?' I asked, stupidly.

"'Oh, dear—why, because we are invisible.'

"I tried to repress a shudder. The professor gave Wilhelmina his arm, and, as I studied his ensemble, I thanked Heaven that he was invisible.

"At the gate of the station I hailed a four-seated cab, and we rattled away through the stony streets, brilliant with gas-jets, and in a few moments rolled smoothly across the Avenue de l'Opéra, turned into the Rue de l'Échelle, and stopped. A bright little page, all over buttons, came out, took my luggage, and preceded us into the hallway.

"I, with Wilhelmina on my arm and the professor shuffling along beside me, walked over to the desk.

"'Room?' said the clerk. 'We have a very desirable room on the second, fronting the Rue St. Honoré—'

"'But we—that is, I want three rooms—three separate rooms!' I said.

"The clerk scratched his chin. 'Monsieur is expecting friends?'

"'Say yes,' whispered Wilhelmina, with a suspicion of laughter in her voice.

"'Yes,' I repeated, feebly.

"'Gentlemen, of course?' said the clerk, looking at me narrowly.

"'One lady.'

"'Married, of course?'

"'What's that to you?' I said, sharply. 'What do you mean by speaking to us—'

"'Us!'

"'I mean to me,' I said, badly rattled; 'give me the rooms and let me get to bed, will you?'

"'Monsieur will remember,' said the clerk, coldly, 'that this is an old and respectable hotel.'

"'I know it,' I said, smothering my rage.

"The clerk eyed me suspiciously.

"'Front!' he called, with irritating deliberation. 'Show this gentleman to apartment ten.'

"'How many rooms are there!' I demanded.

"'Three sleeping-rooms and a parlor.'

"'I will take it,' I said, with composure.

"'On probation,' muttered the clerk, insolently.

"Swallowing the insult, I followed the bell-boy up the stairs, keeping between him and Wilhelmina, for I dreaded to see him walk through her as if she were thin air. A trim maid rose to meet us and conducted us through a hallway into a large apartment. She threw open all the bedroom-doors and said, 'Will monsieur have the goodness to choose?'

"'Which will you take,' I began, turning to Wilhelmina.

"'I? Monsieur!' cried the startled maid.

"That completely upset me. 'Here,' I muttered, slipping some silver into her hand; 'now, for the love of Heaven, run away!'

"When she had vanished with a doubtful 'Merci, monsieur!' I handed the professor the keys and asked him to settle the thing with Wilhelmina.

"Wilhelmina took the corner room, the professor rambled into the next one, and I said good-night and crept wearily into my own chamber. I sat down and tried to think. A great feeling of fatigue weighted my spirits.

"'I can think better with my clothes off,' I said, and slipped the coat from my shoulders. How tired I was! 'I can think better in bed,' I muttered, flinging my cravat on the dresser and tossing my shirt-studs after it. I was certainly very tired. 'Now,' I yawned, grasping the pillow and drawing it under my head—'now I can think a bit.' But before my head fell on the pillow sleep closed my eyes.

"I began to dream at once. It seemed as though my eyes were wide open and the professor was standing beside my bed.

"'Young man,' he said, 'you've won my daughter and you must pay the piper!'

"'What piper?' I said.

"'The Pied Piper of Hamelin, I don't think,' replied the professor, vulgarly, and before I could realize what he was doing he had drawn a reed pipe from his dressing-gown and was playing a strangely annoying air. Then an awful thing occurred. Cats began to troop into the room, cats by the hundred—toms and tabbies, gray, yellow, Maltese, Persian, Manx—all purring and all marching round and round, rubbing against the furniture, the professor, and even against me. I struggled with the nightmare.

"'Take them away!' I tried to gasp.

"'Nonsense!' he said; 'here is an old friend.'

"I saw the white tabby cat of the Hôtel St. Antoine.

"'An old friend,' he repeated, and played a dismal melody on his reed.

"I saw Wilhelmina enter the room, lift the white tabby in her arms, and bring her to my side.

"'Shake hands with him,' she commanded.

"To my horror the tabby deliberately extended a paw and tapped me on the knuckles.

"'Oh!' I cried, in agony; 'this is a horrible dream! Why, oh, why can't I wake!'

"'Yes,' she said, dropping the cat, 'it is partly a dream, but some of it is real. Remember what I say, my darling; you are to go to-morrow morning and meet the twelve-o'clock train from Antwerp at the Gare du Nord. Papa and I are coming to Paris on that train. Don't you know that we are not really here now, you silly boy? Good-night, then. I shall be very glad to see you.'

"I saw her glide from the room, followed by the professor, playing a gay quick-step, to which the cats danced two and two.

"'Good-night, sir,' said each cat as it passed my bed; and I dreamed no more.

"When I awoke, the room, the bed had vanished; I was in the street, walking rapidly; the sun shone down on the broad, white pavements of Paris, and the streams of busy life flowed past me on either side. How swiftly I was walking! Where the devil was I going? Surely I had business somewhere that needed immediate attention. I tried to remember when I had awakened, but I could not. I wondered where I had dressed myself; I had apparently taken great pains with my toilet, for I was immaculate, monocle and all, even down to a long-stemmed rose nestling in my button-hole. I knew Paris and recognized the streets through which I was hurrying. Where could I be going? What was my hurry? I glanced at my watch and found I had not a moment to lose. Then, as the bells of the city rang out mid-day, I hastened into the railroad station on the Rue Lafayette and walked out to the platform. And as I looked down the glittering track, around the distant curve shot a locomotive followed by a long line of cars. Nearer and nearer it came, while the station-gongs sounded and the switch-bells began ringing all along the track.

"'Antwerp express!' cried the sous-chef de gare, and as the train slipped along the tiled platform I sprang upon the steps of a first-class carriage and threw open the door.

"'How do you do, Mr. Kensett?' said Wilhelmina Wyeth, springing lightly to the platform. 'Really it is very nice of you to come to the train.' At the same moment a bald, mild-eyed gentleman emerged from the depths of the same compartment, carrying a large, covered basket.

"'How are you, Kensett?' he said. 'Glad to see you again. Rather warm in that compartment—no, I will not trust this basket to an expressman; give Wilhelmina your arm and I'll follow. We go to the Normandie, I believe?'

"All the morning I had Wilhelmina to myself, and at dinner I sat beside her, with the professor opposite. The latter was cheerful enough, but he nearly ruined my appetite, for he smelled strongly of catnip. After dinner he became restless and fidgeted about in his chair until coffee was brought, and we went up to the parlor of our apartment. Here his restlessness increased to such an extent that I ventured to ask him if he was in good health.

"'It's that basket—the covered basket which I have in the next room,' he said.

"'What's the trouble with the basket?' I asked.

"'The basket's all right—but the contents worry me.'

"'May I inquire what the contents are?' I ventured.

"The professor rose.

"'Yes,' he said, 'you may inquire of my daughter.' He left the room, but reappeared shortly, carrying a saucer of milk.

"I watched him enter the next room, which was mine.

"'What on earth is he taking that into my room for?' I asked Wilhelmina. 'I don't keep cats.'

"'But you will,' she said.

"'I? Never!'

"'You will if I ask you to.'

"'But—but you won't ask me.'

"'But I do.'

"'Wilhelmina!'

"'Harold!'

"'I detest cats.'

"'You must not.'

"'I can't help it.'

"'You will when I ask it. Have I not given myself to you? Will you not make a little sacrifice for me?'

"'I don't understand—'

"'Would you refuse my first request?'

"'No,' I said, miserably, 'I will keep dozens of cats—'

"'I do not ask that; I only wish you to keep one.'

"'Was that what your father had in that basket?' I asked, suspiciously.

"'Yes, the basket came from Antwerp.'

"'What! The white Antwerp cat!' I cried.

"'Yes.'

"'And you ask me to keep that cat? Oh, Wilhelmina!'

"'Listen!' she said. 'I have a long story to tell you; come nearer, close to me. You say you love me?'

"I bent and kissed her.

"'Then I shall put you to the proof,' she murmured.

"'Prove me!'

"'Listen. That cat is the same cat that ran out of the apartment in the Waldorf when your great-aunt ceased to exist—in human shape. My father and myself, having received word from the Mahatmas of the Trust Company, sheltered and cherished the cat. We were ordered by the Mahatmas to convert you. The task was appalling—but there is no such thing as refusing a command, and we laid our plans. That man with a white spot in his hair was my father—'

"'What! Your father is bald.'

"'He wore a wig then. The white spot came from dropping chemicals on the wig while experimenting with a substance which you could not comprehend.'

"'Then—then that clew was useless; but who could have taken the Crimson Diamond? And who was the man with the white spot on his head who tried to sell the stone in Paris?'

"'That was my father.'

"'He—he—st—took the Crimson Diamond!' I cried, aghast.

"'Yes and no. That was only a paste stone that he had in Paris. It was to draw you over here. He had the real Crimson Diamond also.'

"'Your father?'

"'Yes. He has it in the next room now. Can you not see how it disappeared, Harold? Why, the cat swallowed it!'

"'Do you mean to say that the white tabby swallowed the Crimson Diamond?'

"'By mistake. She tried to get it out of the velvet bag, and, as the bag was also full of catnip, she could not resist a mouthful, and

unfortunately just then you broke in the door and so startled the cat that she swallowed the Crimson Diamond.'

"There was a painful pause. At last I said:

"'Wilhelmina, as you are able to vanish, I suppose you also are able to converse with cats.'

"'I am,' she replied, trying to keep back the tears of mortification.

"'And that cat told you this?'

"'She did.'

"'And my Crimson Diamond is inside that cat?'

"'It is.'

"'Then,' said I, firmly, 'I am going to chloroform the cat.'

"'Harold!' she cried, in terror, 'that cat is your great-aunt!'

"I don't know to this day how I stood the shock of that announcement, or how I managed to listen while Wilhelmina tried to explain the transmigration theory, but it was all Chinese to me. I only knew that I was a blood relation of a cat, and the thought nearly drove me mad.

"'Try, my darling, try to love her,' whispered Wilhelmina; 'she must be very precious to you—'

"'Yes, with my diamond inside her,' I replied, faintly.

"'You must not neglect her,' said Wilhelmina.

"'Oh no, I'll always have my eye on her—I mean I will surround her with luxury—er, milk and bones and catnip and books—er—does she read?'

"'Not the books that human beings read. Now, go and speak to your aunt, Harold.'

"'Eh! How the deuce—'

"'Go; for my sake try to be cordial.'

"She rose and led me unresistingly to the door of my room.

"'Good Heavens!' I groaned; 'this is awful.'

"'Courage, my darling!' she whispered. 'Be brave for love of me.'

"I drew her to me and kissed her. Beads of cold perspiration started in the roots of my hair, but I clenched my teeth and entered the room alone. The room was dark and I stood silent, not knowing where to turn, fearful lest I step on my aunt! Then, through the dreary silence, I called, 'Aunty!'

"A faint noise broke upon my ear, and my heart grew sick, but I strode into the darkness, calling, hoarsely:

"'Aunt Tabby! It is your nephew!'

"Again the faint sound. Something was stirring there among the shadows—a shape moving softly along the wall, a shade which glided by me, paused, wavered, and darted under the bed. Then I threw myself on the floor, profoundly moved, begging, imploring my aunt to come to me.

"'Aunty! Aunty!' I murmured. 'Your nephew is waiting to take you to his heart!'

"At last I saw my great-aunt's eyes shining in the dark."

The young man's voice grew hushed and solemn, and he lifted his hand in silence:

"Close the door. That meeting is not for the eyes of the world! Close the door upon that sacred scene where great-aunt and nephew are united at last."

A long pause followed; deep emotion was visible in Miss Barrison's sensitive face. She said:

"Then—you are married?"

"No," replied Mr. Kensett, in a mortified voice.

"Why not?" I asked, amazed.

"Because," he said, "although my fiancée was prepared to accept a cat as her great-aunt, she could not endure the complications that followed."

"What complications?" inquired Miss Barrison.

The young man sighed profoundly, shaking his head.

"My great-aunt had kittens," he said, softly.

The tremendous scientific importance of these experiences excited me beyond measure. The simplicity of the narrative, the elaborate attention to corroborative detail, all bore irresistible testimony to the truth of these accounts of phenomena vitally important to the entire world of science.

We all dined together that night—a little earnest company of knowledge-seekers in the vast wilderness of the unexplored; and we lingered long in the dining-car, propounding questions, advancing

theories, speculating upon possibilities of most intense interest. Never before had I known a man whose relatives were cats and kittens, but he did not appear to share my enthusiasm in the matter.

"You see," he said, looking at Miss Barrison, "it may be interesting from a purely scientific point of view, but it has already proved a bar to my marrying."

"Were the kittens black?" I inquired.

"No," he said, "my aunt drew the color-line, I am proud to say."

"I don't see," said Miss Barrison, "why the fact that your great-aunt is a cat should prevent you from marrying."

"It wouldn't prevent *me*!" said the young man, quickly.

"Nor me," mused Miss Barrison—"if I were really in love."

Meanwhile I had been very busy thinking about Professor Farrago, and, coming to an interesting theory, advanced it.

"If," I began, "he marries one of those transparent ladies, what about the children?"

"Some would be, no doubt, transparent," said Kensett.

"They might be only translucent," suggested Miss Barrison.

"Or partially opaque," I ventured. "But it's a risky marriage—not to be able to see what one's wife is about—"

"That is a silly reflection on women," said Miss Barrison, quietly. "Besides, a girl need not be transparent to conceal what she's doing."

This observation seemed to end our postprandial and tripartite conference; Miss Barrison retired to her stateroom presently; after a last cigar, smoked almost in silence, the young man and I bade each other a civil good-night and retired to our respective berths.

I think it was at Richmond, Virginia, that I was awakened by the negro porter shaking me very gently and repeating, in a pleasant, monotonous voice: "Teleg'am foh you, suh! Teleg'am foh Mistuh Gilland, suh. 'Done call you 'lev'm times sense breakfass, suh! Las' call foh luncheon, suh. Teleg'am foh—"

"Heavens!" I muttered, sitting up in my bunk, "is it as late as that! Where are we?" I slid up the window-shade and sat blinking at a flood of sunshine.

"Telegram?" I said, yawning and rubbing my eyes. "Let me have it. All right, I'll be out presently. Shut that curtain! I don't want the entire

car to criticise my pink pajamas!"

"Ain' nobody in de cyar, 'scusin yo'se'f, suh," grinned the porter, retiring.

I heard him, but did not comprehend, sitting there sleepily unfolding the scrawled telegram. Suddenly my eyes flew wide open; I scanned the despatch with stunned incredulity:

"ATLANTA, GEORGIA.

"We couldn't help it. Love at first sight. Married this morning in Atlanta. Wildly happy. Forgive. Wire blessing.

"(Signed) HAROLD KENSETT, "HELEN BARRISON KENSETT."

"Porter!" I shouted. "Porter! Help!"

There was no response.

"Oh, Lord!" I groaned, and rolled over, burying my head in the blankets; for I understood at last that Science, the most jealous, most exacting of mistresses, could never brook a rival.