

Conrant Bay.

The bell rang. A butler, claiming membership to that obsequious, immutable tribe whose rubric reads side locks, head erect, dazzling livery and a silver tray, entered and placed the cigarettes before two New York gentlemen. He bowed, and backed through the swinging doors.

One of the gentlemen leaned lazily over the table, placed a Phil Monis between his lips and fell back into the comfortable embrace of a big leather chair. He, Ritz Carlstrom was one of the few men I have met on whom a dress suit looks natural, and whose white stand-up collars do not always remind one of an unrelenting vise. His friend, on whom Fifth Avenue and Broadway had placed their individual stamp of refinement and polish, also thrustured a cigarette into his mouth and striking a match, leaned to give Carlstrom a light.

"Haven't been to the club lately," censured the up-to-date product of Fifth and Broadway, whose sole title, Roland Kenseley, stood for gilt-edge credit from the lowest dive to the most exclusive cabaret.

Carlstrom puffed and blew a cone of blue smoke into the air.

"No."

"What's the trouble?" asked Kenseley. "Same old story, Wife won't let me.

"No," assured Carlstrom, "I have begun to settle down. I'm married now Rollie and—"

A ruffling of silk was heard on the stairs and Carlstrom's face lit up in a pleasant smile. Kenseley knowing full well the cause of the sudden change in his friend's demeanor, regarded him earnestly.

"Oh-ho, Ritz," thrilled a pleasing, feminine voice along the hall.

"Yes" answered Carlstrom as he lifted himself out the chair. "Right here."

Kenseley's eyes followed him to the portieres and then listened to the conversation without.

"I am going shopping this afternoonn Ritz," said

the same cheerful voice. "Will you see that the chauffeur brings the car around to the side entrance as soon as possible?"

"Yes" was Carlstrom's reply, and they walked down the stairs, conversing together in low tones.

The purr of a motor as a limousine swung around the oval, and the sudden clamping of the brakes, brought Kenseley to the window. Carlstrom and his wife were walking down the short flight of steps, arm in arm, talking and laughing like school children. A small, white, fluffy poodle sported about them and barked in pure delight.

"No wonder," reflected Kenseley, "the boys at the club said nothing when Carlstrom married. If she was any other woman in the world, I believe we all would have protested."

The car started. It whirled down the gravelled drive, and swerving around the bend, was swallowed up in a sea of foliage.

With the joyous, pregnant smile still lingering on his handsome face, Carlstrom launched himself into the chair he had forsaken and lit another cigarette.

"Guess you forget, old pall, you owe me a story," said Kenseley.

"Wrong again," declared Carlstrom, and a sly look crept into his face.

"You smooth impostor," accused Kenseley, you gave me your word of honor down to the club last month to tell me about your last trip in the Java Sea."

"Can't possibly do it."

"For a friend Ritz?" Kenseley persisted.

"Its a long story Rollie better light up again."

Carlstrom took the cigarette from his mouth and held it in his hand, sinking further down into the big leather chair.

"You know I fell out with dad a few years ago, and was determined to hustle for myself."

"Yes," cut in Kenseley, and your dad was as hot-headed and mule-pated as you were. But no beating around the heather. Get to the story."

"I went directly to San Francisco and boarded a packet there. It was about to sail for the East Indies.

I went to sea as a sailor but in the course of one short year, was promoted from the forecastle to the cabin. Here my progress and all my dreams of amassing a fortune were shattered, for I was wrecked, the hurricane of 1904 sending my ship to the bottom of the sea.

"For three long days I labored in a frisky coracle without food or drink. Cold at night and sweltering in the day my strength slowly oozed out of my body leaving my muscles numb, my joints stiff and sore. My coracle lurched viciously and unable to control it any longer I found myself in the water. Little were my hopes, when I first struck out, of ever reaching the green shore that lay in a circle about me, but through sheer determination I found myself lifted on a huge, mounting wave and tossed far up on the florid beach.

The noon sun directly above me, sultry and potent, the beach glistening and sizzling, my throat parched and my eyes burning, all aided unmercifully in heightening my excessive torture. I lay there on the iridescent sand my body racked from head to foot. Cries of pain, agony and horror fell from my lips as the fear of death crept squeamishly over me. Not that I feared death alone, but I shuddered at the thought of dying on such a small and insignificant an island, inhabited only by vipers and cobras.

"I turned my head. My muscles suddenly became tense and my body quivered and shook as if recharged with a new life. Three men in white linens and broad Panama hats were strolling leisurely along the beach. One espied me and all three, simultaneously mended their pace and hastened towards me. I strove vainly to rise but was relieved from all further exertion when one of the number fell upon me and pinned me to the ground with the weight of his body.

"Nice kind of a welcome," I muttered, "especially when a fellow has been fighting for his life for three days."

"The leader an old man with cold, grey eyes, scanty white hair, and large athletic frame, scrutinized me like a tiger surveying the luscious parts of its humble victim. He motioned for the man, who was

kneeling on my chest and holding my arms, to move away.

"Get up", he commanded brusquely.

"Can't."

"Then carry him boys" he ordered, leading the way through a slender, beaten path up to a low bungalow with a broad veranda facing the sea.

"The old man seated himself in a rattan chair and gazed meditatively far out to sea. his face stern and inexorable, his pudgy hands clasped over his abnormal stomach.

Turning abruptly, as if cutting his thoughts in twain, he faced me propped between the other two.

"What are you doing in my harbor? he asked in a gruff heavy voice.

"Shipwrecked !

"What ship? "

"Charlotte Benning ; Coffee from Java ; All hands ; I replied promptly.

"He raised his hand. I turned my head in the direction he pointed and my eyes rested on six little mounds, two of which seemed to have been raised lately.

"There's where men like you have gone," he drawled, "far better men than you. I'll see you tomorrow."

"A big Malay, wooden-faced like all menials, and incredibly immaculate in his attire, led me into the bungalow, and into a small room partly opened and heavily screened, a light cot in the centre being its only article of furniture. Food and water were brought, and exhausted and spent, I stretched out on the little cot and fell asleep.

"I wakened in the heavy scented darkness of the morning and discerned over the bay a slight, wavering mist veiling the soft glamour of the moon. Soon the sun, a blazing orb, appeared on the rounded horizon and the mists rose revealing the bay moving in long, graceful swells.

"I let my eyes roam idly about this enchanted bay, drinking in its exquisite panorama. Suddenly I was brought to concentrate all my attention on one spot.

A shaft of gold rose from the blue water and flashed through the morning air. Some distance from the shore a head rode, glistening on the rolling swell. Two arms rose and fell about it, rythmically, powerfully. Near and nearer it came. Then rising like an afrighted mermaid, a girl, tall and sparkling beautiful, bounded through the water churning it to foam as she shuffled through it. She paused on the beach to gather her long, blonde hair which lay scattered, like a mass of gold, on her head and shoulders. Like a goddess she stood there slowly coursing her slender fingers through the long tresses. She suddenly ceased, glanced about and ran swiftly along the beach, vanishing into the forest.

"Mystified and perplexed, I stood gazing at the spot from whence this amazing creature emerged, long after she had disappeared. The strange island, its strange inhabitants, and above all this lovely girl, blossomed into tender womanhood, formed an impregnable web of mystery. Instead of slowly unravelling itself the threads became more confused, so cumbrous in fact, that I felt a decided relief when the door opened and a man entered, the man whose strength I had felt the day before

"He was a big, muscular, weather-tanned man of middle age. On the edge of the bed he settled himself and surveyed me appraisingly.

"Morning," he snapped. "Came to see you. What's your name?

"Ritz"

"Ritz what?" he roared.

"Carlstrom" I returned, assimilating his roughness.

"On what craft did you ship? He spoke now in a mild, matter-of-fact tone.

"Charlotte Benning" I answered. "Coffee from Java. Struck blind ledge. All hands gone."

"Never heard of her" he answered shaking his head.

"What place is this? I asked.

"Conrant Bay. Lonely place this" he said, drearily.

"Yes" I acquiesced.

"D'ye know why these folks are on this pigmy island?"

"The question nearly bowled me over. You could have felled me with a feather.

"No," I answered.

"You must know. The old man thinks everyone who comes here knows."

"Don't know."

"Are you sure you don't know? Well, what d'ye think they're waiting for? Been in the lookout for twelve years."

"Marooned," I ventured.

"No!"

"Buried treasure; doubloons; louis d'or; ivory." I surmised.

"No. For an old three sticked lugger and a pig of a man, Captian Renfrew, who should have been keel-hauled and strung from a lanyard long ago. The old man watches for him every day. He was due here twelve years ago to take us off this miserable uncharted speck."

"I nodded my head with perfect intelligence and urged him on.

"Yep, the old man even wants to hunt for him. Six men have come here, all shipwrecked like you, but the old man could not trust them. I was ordered to murder them all. The old man showed you where they now lie."

"A sharp quiver ran through my body and a sense of horror came over me.

"But who is the beautiful girl I saw on the beach this morning?" I asked, counterfeiting a calm.

"The old man's daughter," he answered gruffly. 'Been on the island all her life, suppose she'll die here.'

He rose with a short, rancous chuckle. and moved his huge frame towards the door.

"Haven't you any other way of getting off this island?" I called after him. 'No money: no boats?'

"Plenty of money, lots of boats, but—" He closed the door behind him.

"The morning was fast dwindling into day when the silent Malay ushered me before the Lord of the Island and his cabinet of two. They were drinking their morning eye-opener on the spacious veranda. The old man sat looking far out to sea, reminiscently, sorrowfully. He drained his glass and shifted his stern gaze upon me.

"Heh, you here?' he said, finally turning in his chair and joining his hands over his stomach. 'My name is Reynolds. This is Mr. Sharp,' motioning to the person at his left, the man who visited me earlier in the morning. I nodded. 'And this is Mr. Weeks,' making a gesture to his right. Mr. Weeks was a gaunt, scraggy man with dead, non-expressive eyes and a napiform, which looked too ponderous to rest comfortably on his thin ostrich neck, rose and gripped my hand.

"Now that we are all acquainted,' said Reynolds inspecting me critically, 'lets get down to business. Are you going to sign with us?'

"I hesitated. 'Sign for what?'

"Sign,' he replied sharply. "Yes or no is the answer I want..'

"The color had reached his face. His eyes blazed, and his hands twitched nervously. Sharp was regarding me earnestly, while Weeks gazed into space, wrapped in absorbing thoughts.

"I lifted my eyes. My heart fluttered with excitement; all thoughts of signing drifted from me. In the doorway stood the beautiful girl I had seen only a few hours ago, now dressed in a wonderfully plain Grecian-like gown. Her thick, blonde hair was massed close to her head, one lone, vagrant strand touching her soft cheek. Her eyes, sapphire-blue, met mine for the first time—and lingered, soft and wonderful, tender and mystical. I was transported, intoxicated under their magical influence and the old man's rasping voice brought me to realize that I had yet to give my answer.

"Decide." He glared at me fiercely. His mouth closed firmly, caused innumerable wrinkles to seam his flabby cheeks.

"Yes,' I cried mechanically. "Yes, I'll sign."

"The hardened lines on his face relaxed and his cheeks bulged into a smile. 'Good then. I expected you would. Perhaps you will regret it. We'll arrange the other business tomorrow!'

"I did not see these men during the day except at meal time. During the repast not a word was spoken. The girl sat opposite me, superb, circumspect, ignoring altogether my presence. She would at times glance casually at the sordid, reticent figures before her, who brooded each in his own silent manner, their faces clouded with some mysterious catastrophe.

"A female Malay, both tall and broad, with protruding teeth, flattened nose and an enormous head swathed in a red turban, stood behind the girl's chair. Whenever I chanced to look across the table my eyes were met by two black, fiery balls which glowered down upon me with the ferocity of a tigress.

"The night grew hot and a moon flooded the forest and water with a silvery glow that almost equalled the light of day. Judging everyone to be asleep, I crept noiselessly from my room and sat on the veranda, contemplating the outcome of to-morrow.

"I felt a soft hand lay its weight on my shoulder. I turned suddenly and looked into her smiling face the girl I saw on the beach, the girl who appeared in the doorway in the morning. Bowing her head she lisped something I was unable to understand, and like a silvery shadow tiptoed silently away. A tender ringing voice called after her, 'Aren't you going to follow me?'

"She led me out into the moonlight and down to the beach where we sat and gazed out across the limitless water and watched the balls of phosphorescence luminating the water in a glittering green, disappearing as mysteriously as they originated.

"The girl was the first to speak. This amazing creature turned to me with all the innocence of a child.

"What is your name?"

"She sustained my steady gaze, her blue eyes sparkling with the merriment of a mischievous boy exulting in his first alarming adventure.

"Ritz!"

"She mumbled the name softly, then pronounced it aloud, over and over again.

"Ritz? she said finally. What a strange name. I never heard it before. But it is a pretty name!

"She chattered gaily on, questioning me about my life from the time I first went to sea to my arrival on the island. Her eyes grew large with wonderment as I described the luxurious world without, and she sat there motionless, her chin resting on her hand, as if held in a cross of amaze.

"She turned to me once again and I felt my senses swim when she lifted her blue innocent eyes! Ritz is that your first name? Yes? What is the last?

"Carlstrom!

"The forecastle lights of a schooner, attracted us. The girl paused, her bosom heaved stormingly and she uttered a faint inarticulated sound.

"Is she changing her course? She whispered in a breath.

The vessel which was probably blown out of her course was now taking a tack to the wind, bound no doubt for Magura.

"Oh! she gasped, she layed a hand on my arm and whispered pathetically. It must never come. It must never come!

"It was then an overwhelming wave of tenderness came over me and I realized that I was now deeply in love with this exquisitely beautiful girl beside me. One thought, that of her being the daughter of this callous Reynolds, dampened for an instant, my burning ardor, but being rejected served only to intensify its severity. I turned to her: she was gone.

"I walked slowly back to the bungalow, baffled and wearied by the strange mystery that seemingly enveloped the island and its inhabitants. Tomorrow I would learn at least a part of it. What was expected of me? I had signed not knowing for what purpose. Perhaps I had signed my own life away.

"At the end of the morning meal Reynolds bade me follow him. He led me to a little room into which I had never been permitted to enter. The room was bare save for a small picture which was tacked on the wall.

Sharp and Weeks stood gazing at it, their back pockets bulged with hands, muttering low curses. A dark, flint-like face with black, piercing eyes looked out from the picture.

"You see that face? asked Reynolds.

"Yes! I returned moving nearer.

"Did you ever see a face similar to it?"

"I thought I had seen a resemblance in Surabaya, but not being certain I answered in the negative.

"Well let me introduce you to Captain Renfrew, the biggest scoundrel that ever reached the East Indies, he rasped fiercely. 'He's the man we want, the man we must see at once. Study the picture, and when you can pick that man out of a thousand, come to me. You have got to look for him and bring him here.'

"The more I studied the face and its cold chiselled lines the more I became convinced that it was an exact similitude of a man known to me as Old Sloan. He kept the dingiest saloon and sold the rankest liquor in Surabaya.

"The following days were spent in company with the girl, during which time I failed to elicit a single fact, or even an inkling which would lead to the unravelling of the mystery. It was with reluctance I tore myself away from her and informed the old man of my willingness to start.

"A bag of gold was given to me with the instructions that I would go to Surabaya, the nearest port, and either charter or purchase a vessel there, and scour every port in the East Indies for the missing Captain Renfrew.

"My five swarthy Sumbans drove the canoe through the swells at an amazing speed and the little island and its inhabitants, whom I left standing on the beach, soon faded from sight.

"For three long days the lasiars paddled silently, battling with tides that ran slant and crosswise. The third night brought us in sight Java, the garish lights of Surabaya glaring ophidian-like out of the black city and reflected drunkenly on the water.

I sent the Sumbans back and strolled through a purlieu of murky, badly-lighted streets to Sloans saloon

which was located in the most wretched part of a filthy district. A motley gathering crowded up close to the bar, drinking, talking and smoking long black stogies.

While shouldering up to the bar, Sloan saw me and in his surprise left the beer tap open and the precious liquid streamed out on the floor much to the anxiety of a thirsty stoker, who leaning over the counter, endeavored to rescue the gushing liquor in his schooner.

"Well of all the pork eating Hindus if it ain't Ritz Carlstrom," he exploded. "When did you anchor? Who are you sailing with now? Doggone it, if I ain't glad to see you. Come into the backroom and we'll talk things over."

He addressed his assistant in low tones for a moment, and led the way to a small room lit by a dim, smoky lamp which hung over a small table.

Drinks were brought in by a straight-haired, almond-eyed Jap. I kept strict guard over myself, drinking slowly and talking while Sloam listened and gulped glass after glass in quick succession. These frequent libations loosed his tongue and soon he began to gibe along in an incoherent manner, hiccoughing at regular intervals. He harangued on ships and stormed about Hindus, Chinese and Japs. When he became quiet again I leaned over the table and asked, "Do you know a secret island in the Java Sea?"

"Ha ha" he bellowed slapping his hand on the table with a resounding thwack. "S'got a nice collection of criminals? Heh, Ritzie. Those three-hic-yellow, ain't got no backbone. Ye know Ritzie-ye got more spunk than a cargoe of them. Hic-ye're a good old toper too, Ritzie, only yer-hic- yer get drunk too often to suit yer little uncle hic."

"About those three men?" I asked anxiously.

"Oh now, Pitzie" he sobbed, getting melodramatic of a sudden. "Can't yer give an old sea Cap. a chance? "Hic-detectives were closing in I rescued the three of them like a gallant hero from the-ersleuth. They ain't got no backbone, Ritzie-ye're worth a cargoe of them. S'I took em to a little island in Java Sea and they ain't got grit enough to come back s'without me."

"You promised to go back" I intercepted. He looked at me and blinked profusely.

"Yes-hic-I sure did Ritzie. Those fellows got lots of money. I took most of it on the lugger but left a lot with them. I had hard luck, Ritzie-the old lugger got wrecked off the Solomons. I'm going-er-to hunt for her some day. S'lots of money on her. S'lots of money on the island. I'll go back there some day and take 'em off and take their money. Kind a keep a little record of them here." He flouted a paper before me and threw it on the table.

Another bottle put the stamp of completion upon him and he toppled from the chair, and layed on the floor, the empty bottle still clutched firmly in his hand.

I picked up the paper and thrust it into my pocket and left the saloon my head swimming and my thoughts in a maze. Hardly knowing where I was going I walked through the now deserted streets and soon found myself down among the wharfs again.

The squeaking of pulleys as a boat was being lowered from a davit attracted my attention. In the dark I could make out the faint lines of a vessel. A rowboat was putting off from it.

A rope hit the wharf and an invisible voice commanded, "make fast." Clambering up the rope hand over hand a giant lascar faced me.

"What is she?" I asked.

"For sale," was his reply.

"What kind of a vessel?" I asked again.

"Schooner, sir. Had her on coast trade. Want to buy her sir?"

I bargained on the wharf and the next morning sailed for the Solomons with a cook and four lascars for a crew.

Alone in my cabin I glanced over the finger-worn paper Sloan had thrown on the table. What I read in the first lines startled me, and I gasped for breath as the affects of my first surprise left me. Instantly the curtain rose and my blood curdled in my veins for I saw before me, grim and heinous, three widely known criminals of the world.

The paper yielded up a great mystery, John

Reynolds was the notorious Kirk Garric, a name which people of all classes uttered only in curses. He was the man who originated and managed the London Goldbrick of '82 and left England with the loot. Sharp was a murderer, who killed his partner in business, adhered to all the money within his grasp and fled from the country. Astounded and bewildered I read slowly down the page. The next paragraph revealed the fate of the girl. She was the kidnapped daughter of an American millionaire and Weeks was the abductor. At the very end was written : Schooner Tillie H. Lost on the Solomons.

The paper fluttered from my hand and I stood contemplating it as it lay on the floor. Years ago while sailing among the Solomons I saw the Tillie H. blown far up on the shore of a little Island. She rested on an even keel a hundred feet from the tide. One lone mass survived the terrific storm, but it then raked dangerously forward. Her hull was bearded with vegetation which found growth in her yawning seams and spread in confusion over her ruined deckhouses.

I decided that it could be no other than Sloan's lost ship, so I walked down the deck and ordered my saurang to put about and steer for the island.

We reached Conrant Bay in the early dawn and anchored. On my quarter deck I waited the arrival of the two canoes which were putting out from the shore. The first canoe was paddled by Reynolds and the girl, the second by Sharp and Weeks.

I ordered my saurang to allow only the occupants of the first canoe to come aboard.

The girl radiant and beautiful in the early morning sun, smiled as she neared me. Reynolds followed her. He walked with a slow, weighty tread over the wooden decks and approached me anxiously.

"Was you successful, Mr. Carlstrom," he asked, "Have you got Renfrew below?"

"No," I replied, fixing on him a steady gaze. "But I have all the latest stock quotations from the London and New York markets, Mr. Kirk Garric!"

Instantly his face flushed and then became inflexible and rigid. He glared at me demon-like and wheeled, walking towards the rail. He turned abruptly. I

noticed a quick movement of his wrist and a slight turn of his arm. A streak of light flashed between us and I felt a sharp burning pain in my shoulder. It was as though a glowing hot spike was suddenly driven through me. He drew a still longer knife and started for me, his eyes bulging from their sockets, his veins extended on his forehead. The swell of the sea caused the vessel to settle at the stern. The knife clattered to the deck and Reynolds overbalanced, fell, striking his head on an iron belay pin. He was knocked unconscious, and I picked him up bodily and threw him like a carcass of dead meat into the sea. The girl, leaning on the wheel, gasped a sigh of relief.

I watched the body as it slowly sank without a struggle. Sharp and Weeks were floundering in the water, their canoe which upset, was floating down the stream. They struggled for a few moments, cursing Renfrew and myself, and then disappeared forever.

The shaft of a native *kris* was still sticking out of my shoulder, and I ruthlessly drew it out, a spurt of blood following it, dyeing my shirt red. I yelled to the crew to up-anchor, and soon we were under way, leaving in our wake, three bodies floating face downward.

Weakened by the loss of blood I fell into the arms of a lascar and wakened in my cabin while far out to sea. My shoulders were carefully swathed in bandages, the work of no other person than the girl.

I called my saurang and ordered, "Make for the nearest port."

An automobile whirled up the drive and stopped. Carlstrom rose and walked to the window.

"Who was the girl, Ritz?" asked Kensely.

"You are too late, Rollie," laughed Carlstrom in perfect good humor. "She was Lorretta M. Perkins."

"Your wife." Kensely exclaimed.

"Yes."

THOMAS H. ELLIS.