Walden Walter

The Voodoo Gold Trail

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
WE GET INTERESTING NEWS

It was on a tropic sea, and night, that I heard a little scrap of a tale that had in it that which was destined to preserve my life. The waning moon had not yet risen; the stars were all out, the Milky Way more than commonly near. The schooner's sails were barely drawing, and flapped idly at times. I leaned on the rail, listening to the purling of the sea against the vessel's side, and watching the phosphorescence where the water broke. The bell had just sounded a double stroke – two bells. Near by, the taciturn black fellow – who was our guide, and who alone (as shall appear) knew our course and destination – was in talk with Rufe, our black cook.

Heretofore, this man – black he was, but having hair straight as an Indian's – had been steadfastly mum on the subject of his past; this manifestly being but part and parcel of his policy to avoid any hint of the place to which he was piloting us. But now, I gathered, he was reciting to Rufe an episode set in this far away land to the south; and I cocked my ear. He was telling of something that had happened in his grandfather's experience, who, as he said, was in the service of the king of that land. It was one day when this king was set upon by his enemies, who came thundering on the doors; and the king employed the narrator's grandfather to assist him in his escape. The king collected his jewels and much gold which he put in a bag, and set it on the back of his servant. Then he led the way to a dungeon in the palace. Set in the thick rock wall of this dark cell was a shrine, a carved Calvary – Christ on the cross and figures at the foot.

"The king," the black narrator was saying, "horrify my gran'father, when he put his hand right on the Virgin, and pull that piece out. Then the sacrarium swing open, and there is one big hole, and the king push my gran'father through, and come after."

And he went on to tell how the king had led on, groping down the steps of this secret passage, and presently out into the forest; and how they two finally came to a fortress, and found safety.

It is this circumstance that (for the very good reason indicated) stands most forward, as I look back over the early days of that voyage. And you are to hear more of that.

Sailing the seas in search of adventure was not altogether a new thing for me. Nor was it to be quite a novelty – the drifting into mysterious places, and the poking into hornets' nests. Indeed, my friend, Ray Reid, declared that it seemed like I was picked out to drag poor, inoffensive young innocents (meaning himself) into all kinds of scrapes – and that every little while. But it was with neither a light heart nor an indifferent purpose that I, for one, set forth on this new enterprise, of which it has been given me to tell the tale. I had been orphaned of my dear mother two years before, when I was barely sixteen; and recently my father, who was a builder of houses, had variously suffered, in pocket and in health, and had journeyed far to the west, in the hope to recuperate both. And I lay awake nights, trying to hatch schemes for earning money, and that in considerable amount. It was mortgages harassed us; one on our home, and more on other property.

It was then there came the letter from Julian Lamartine, a good friend, far south in New Orleans, and in whose company my comrades and I had sailed in a former voyage. He now proposed – in fact he had long planned – another adventure. This time it was to seek certain gold fields in the tropics, his letter said, of which he had had some private news. The real mainspring of his enterprise, I allege, was to seek to make some return to my comrades and myself for certain services we had rendered him on this former voyage. For it was on this occasion he came into his wealth; and he maintained

he owed it all to us. Thus, it was Julian Lamartine, who was finding the ship and all the equipment – in short paying the whole shot.

Most of our original crew were either scattered or hopelessly entangled in some employment or other, so that there remained only three to make that journey from Illinois to the point of departure in the southland: Ray Reid, Robert Murtry, and myself (Wayne Scott, to give you my name). Two old friends met us in the station in New Orleans. They were Julian and our former sailing master, Jean Marat.

"I am so ver' glad to see you once again," said Jean Marat, as with his beaming smile he took our hands. "We go some more an' fight thee pirates, eh?" he continued.

"Say now!" broke in Ray, "I want you to let me get my full growth before you steer me among any more of that crew." Ray often told how he had been scared out of two years' growth in a minute, that he never would be able to raise a moustache, and that the reason he hadn't lost his hair was because he had had his hat on. I don't believe Ray ever knew what it was to be really scared. An earthquake wouldn't disconcert him; he'd make sport while the ground was shaking him off his feet.

When greetings were over, Julian spoke up, "Madame Marat has insisted that we take supper with her. The carriage is outside, and it's time we were going."

Madame Marat was the mother of Jean Marat. She was a handsome, sympathetic, motherly soul, and we had all sampled her cookery. When we were bowling along behind the horses, Julian put his hand on my knee. "Wayne," he said, "You ought to have seen how she took on when I told her you had lost your mother. If it hadn't been winter she would have taken the train next day, and gone to you. But she declared she would never have lived to reach there in the cold."

When we had climbed the stairs and gone into the little parlor, Madame Marat held forth her hands to me, "*Ah, mon chere!*" she said. And she had me in her motherly clasp – only a mother knows how.

Madame pushed us in, to a table steaming and savory with her French things, dishes she knew so well how to concoct. And there was grinning black Rufe, who had been all his life in the service of Julian Lamartine's family. And then, when the meal was well under way, and we had all had our fill of comparing notes, Julian opened the business of our projected voyage.

"You probably noticed that I hadn't much to say in my letter regarding details," he said, "where we're going and so on. The fact is, I don't know."

We showed our interest.

"It was Rufe, here, that picked up the information," went on Julian. "I'm going to let him tell you how it was. Rufe," he turned to the black fellow, "tell the boys how you found the man."

"Well," began Rufe, "you sees I got some kin living up Tchoupetoulas way, an' I hadn' been to see um fo' a right smart long time. So I goes. An' dere I meets up wid a niggah I ain't seed befo', whose name is Amos. He ben in town moh dan a week, an' he was low down sick – lef' by some ship he been a' sailin' on. He's home way off some'ere, he don' say where. Well, I dopes him up on calomel and quinine, like ol' Mistah Lamartine use ter do, an' he soon gets well, an' he kinder tuck a shine to me. An' after a while he tells me how he an' a brother of hisn has got a gol' mine some'eres, an' as how his father discover dat gol' mine. Amos was a little pickaninny then, an' his father tells him as how he is goin' to show him dat gol' mine when he gits big 'nuff. But when he try to sell the gol' wat he take fum de mine, a ornery debbil of a white man gits in wid Amos' father in de mine, an' murder him. Amos say he know dat, 'cause he's father nebber come back, and dat white man, he jis' is swimmin' in gol' fum dat time on.

"Amos plumb refuse to tell whar dat place is, 'cept hit on an islan' down South America way. But he say ef I got some sure 'nuff hones' folks dat'll go, he take 'em to dat island and divide up fair an' square, w'en de gol' mine is foun'. He say he an' his brother ain't nebber foun' de mine, cause dat white man tol' 'em dat ef dey come nosin' roun' dey is goin' to get shot. And Amos showed me in his leg where he once did git shot."

"Well say," broke in Ray, "did this Amos ever show you what kind of stuff he burns in his pipe?"

"Yes, perhaps he's just yarning," spoke up Robert, "so as to get somebody to take him back home."

Julian shook his head.

"No," he said. "That's what I thought when Rufe first told me the story. But I've talked with him enough times to feel satisfied he's in earnest. He tells a straight story, so far as he will tell. And he refuses to say where the island is, but agrees to take us there."

We all saw this black fellow, Amos, the next day, and we came to Julian's conviction of the fellow's truthfulness; though I will not avouch that our willingness to believe had not something to do with it. He was rather a taciturn, sober-featured being. His hair was not crinkly like the average negro, and his nose resembled an Indian's. Though illiterate, he showed intelligence, and he would add nothing to the tale he had told to Rufe, except that the islands of Cuba and Jamaica might be considered to lie in the path to this island of his nativity and our goal.

CHAPTER II
WE MEET WITH A SERIOUS REVERSE

I shall not dwell on our preparations for the voyage; nor shall I attempt a lengthy description of the schooner *Pearl* which lay in the Basin. Jean Marat's eyes sparkled, when first we came in view of her. She was of one hundred and twenty-one tons burden, and sported a flying-jib, jib, fore mainsail, foresail, fore gaff top-sail, mainsail, and main gaff top-sail. Forward, a companionway led down to the men's quarters; after, the cabin roof, with its grated skylight, was raised but a little above the deck. Two small boats hung in davits. The cabin was sufficiently spacious, and there were four staterooms, and then there was the galley – the jolly Rufe's domain. And he took great pride in exhibiting its treasures.

A day early in August saw us out in the broad Gulf of Mexico, all of the *Pearl's* sails set to the westerly breeze. Madame Marat mothered our party. In fair weather when she was engineering Rufe's activities in the galley, she sat with her lace-work on the deck. Even the roughest of the sailors would put himself in the way of her smile.

And then, late one afternoon there gradually rose out of the sea the higher peaks of Jamaica. And on the following day we made the harbor of Kingston, a beautiful city, with its fringe of cocoa palms at the front, and at its back the mountains clad in tropical vegetation. It was here events were brewing that were to set a kink in our plans. It was here, too, that Madame Marat had old friends expecting her arrival. Indeed, we had not long been at anchor till they had found us out; Monsieur Paul Duchanel and Madame Duchanel.

But a real shock, too, awaited us. I had no sooner made my bow to the Duchanels than I turned, directed by Ray's grinning look, to see an old friend of our former voyage, Grant Norris, whom we had believed to be in England. He had come over the other rail.

"Thought you were going to slip away on another ramble without me, did you?" was his greeting.

Julian and Marat had kept this thing a surprise for Ray, Robert and myself. They had been in correspondence with Norris, and he had found it convenient to join us here. He explained that his sister's husband had been sent by his London employers to represent them in Jamaica.

What with entertainment in the home of the Duchanels and in that of Norris's sister, and the drives over the wonderful roads, among groves of palms, mahogany, and multi-colored tropical vegetation, three days had soon gone. It was on the fourth day that we three boys found the cherished opportunity to turn a little trick at the expense of Jean Marat and Grant Norris. These two were crack shots with the rifle; we had witnessed samples of their shooting years back. On this day we six drove out of Kingston some miles, to a mountain stream to fish. Robert and I carried what purported to be cases holding fancy fishing rods. Ray was to manage the show.

"Now, gentlemen," he began, when we had settled down on a grassy slope beside the stream, "now, gentlemen, I want to show you the trick of the disappearing mangoes." He produced two small green mangoes and set one each on the ends of two long bamboo fishing rods. These he handed to Marat and Norris. "Now, gentlemen," he again began his speech, "wave them slowly from side to side. Watch the mangoes very carefully and see them disappear. Watch very carefully or you will miss it."

Robert and I had slipped away behind the bushes to a distance of about sixty yards. Marat and Norris smilingly watched the mangoes, as they waved them far above their heads. Then suddenly their faces changed, as the mangoes shattered, as if from an internal explosion.

Robert and I sped back, as the two astounded men were scratching their heads over Ray's trick. And we exhibited our .22 caliber rifles, fitted with *silencers*.

"Ah, that was ver' clever," said Marat, as he slapped us on the back.

Norris rolled Robert in the grass in playful punishment. "To think," said Norris, "that these kids would play a trick like that on us! – and to put *silencers* on their guns."

Robert and I had worked long, and expended very much ammunition, in our ambition to emulate these two rifle-men, and now we had our reward.

When we arrived back in Kingston with our basket of fish that evening, it was to hear startling news. There was great excitement in the home of the Duchanels. A family of close friends and neighbors had this day been bereft of their little seven-year-old daughter, Marie Cambon. She had been last seen before noon at play in the yard of the Cambon home, where there was much growth of flowers and decorative bushes, at the back. The city and surrounding country was being carefully searched, we were told.

Our party was making preparations to join in the search when black Rufe appeared. His usual jovial face was a picture of terror.

"Amos, he done daid," he announced.

"Amos dead!" said Julian, "What, how – what do you mean?" he stammered.

Rufe told the story. He and Amos had been on board the *Pearl* when the news of the disappearance of the Cambon child came to them. "It's the voodoo," Amos had said. And thereupon he became restless, and presently was for rowing ashore. He wanted to get a nearer view of a certain sailing vessel he pointed out; but insisted on getting that view from some place up the shore; he would not go near it in a boat. So the two rowed to shore and made their way toward the desired spot. It was a sheltered region amongst the trees and brush. Amos was well in advance of Rufe. Suddenly a group of two blacks and one white man appeared in an open space.

"Dat white man an' Amos on a suddent stopped," said Rufe, "like two high stumps, de white man wid his han' to his face. Den Amos turn 'roun' an' say, 'Run!' And he run one way, an' I run anoder. I run nigh half a mile, an' den I gets ashame' o' myse'f an' stop. I run jes' 'cause he sayed 'run.' I sayed to myse'f, 'Dis ain't no way fo' you to do,' an' den I goes back. I goes de way I seen Amos run – I picked up a club, not a knowin' jis' what hits all about. I didn' go fur till I see Amos lyin' on de groun', an' a puddle o' blood. An' he was plumb daid."

"Did you hear a shot?" said Norris.

"No, dar warn't no shot; hit was a knife dat did it," declared Rufe. "Now you-all know, Julian," continued the poor black, "it ain't my way to run; I run jes' 'cause he sayed run."

We reassured him, telling him we knew him too well to doubt. And then we took steps to recover the body.

Darkness had spread over the city and harbor by this time. With Rufe's help effort was made to identify the vessel that had excited Amos's curiosity; and it was learned, finally, that a sailing vessel had moved out of the harbor soon after darkness had fallen; and before the return of day it became possible to identify the vessel. It was the schooner *Josephine*, owned by a Monsieur Mordaunt, that had thus stolen away in the murk.

It was then the parents of the missing little Marie Cambon made known to us certain facts that had apparently strong bearing on these events. For a year past this M. Mordaunt had been a suitor for the hand of their elder daughter, Josephine. He had come to Kingston in his handsome yacht; and had almost taken the society of Kingston by storm. He appeared well educated, accomplished, and apparently possessed vast riches, expending money with astounding lavishness. He professed to come from France, but balked all efforts to induce him to be particular as to his antecedents; till finally it became whispered about that this Mordaunt bore an assumed name, and that he not only was of mixed blood, but that some of it was ignoble blood.

It was then Cambon forbade him the house. For the past several weeks he had sought an interview with Miss Josephine, who had been dutifully guided by her parents, though she was slow to accept the unfavorable reports.

The next day following the tragedy there came news of a mysterious ship's boat having put in in the night beyond Portland Point, and taken on a pair of black men who had with them a huge hamper.

Madame Cambon's condition was pitiable. Not a tear did she shed; she was dazed and all but dumb of the shock. She would not rest, but must go with the others in the search. She walked until her limbs gave way, then she must continue in a carriage. In the morning her strength failed, and blessed unconsciousness came. It was Madame Marat took her in hand.

Our party joined in the hunt, and it was not till noon of the day following the disappearance, that all came together again. We had been guided by people of Kingston in the search. Now we of the *Pearl* had all come to experience a desire to put our heads together to some purpose as a separate party. It quickly developed that all minds were as one on several particulars. Even had we not lost our guide in the quest for gold, that lure had been pushed aside by this new, humane call.

"And now," said Norris, "We've got to decide what's to be our line."

"And you all know as well as I do," began Ray, "who it is that's got it all figured out."

And they all turned their eyes on myself. It was always Ray's way, when in the old days our little troop of boys met problems, he usually contrived to put the solution up to me. During our former voyage, whenever an enigma presented, he discouraged all efforts of the others by assuring them that Wayne would work it out without half trying; just leave it all to him! And there was the inevitable result. Ray was always incorrigible.

A number of circumstances were significant: This M. Mordaunt held a grievance against the Cambon family; his character is at least under suspicion; the time and manner of his sailing away is also suspicious; the close association between Amos's getting the news of the child's disappearance and his suddenly awakened interest in that vessel in the harbor was a suspicious circumstance; it developed that Mordaunt's yacht lay opposite to that point to which Amos went to obtain a nearer view of the vessel of his interest; it is very probable that the white man seen by Rufe was Mordaunt, and that he it was caused Amos's death; that it must have been that Amos had some knowledge of him the publishing of which he had some reason to fear; this Mordaunt then must be a very fiend; on learning of the child's disappearance Amos had declared that it was the voodoo, and according to Rufe's account he talked like he knew – this is a thing Madame Cambon must not hear of —

"Jus' so," agreed Marat. "She could not stand to think that."

"Now then," I said, "we are agreed on one thing. We must seek Mordaunt's schooner yacht *Josephine*, and not forget voodoo for a guide."

"Of course we're agreed on it," said Ray, in his tantalizing manner, mingling sport with earnest.

CHAPTER III
WE SAIL ON A DIFFERENT QUEST

There were none among us who had not heard stories of the voodoo, of that strange snake worship of the negroes; how at night the devotees came together secretly in the forest; and how they got themselves into a frenzy of excitement with the music of the drum and the drinking of rum, which they mixed with the blood of fowls, or better that of a goat; how at times they were not satisfied with anything less than the blood of a human (*the goat without horns*). It was more often a child, black or white, which was sacrificed to the voodoo god, which was incarnate in the form of a small green snake, kept in a basket on a platform, on which appeared the *papaloi* or *mamaloi* who presided at the horrid ceremony. Then it became an orgie – dancing – cannibalism, for after the warm blood had been drunk, the flesh was boiled and eaten.

Thus you can imagine our horror at the thought of sweet little Marie Cambon falling into such hands; and so too you will understand our easy abandonment of every other ambition that we might turn our zeal toward the rescue of this poor innocent.

Monsieur Cambon's suspicions, too, had turned to this Mordaunt, when the report of the schooner's flight in the dark had come to him, and particularly so when the news came of the mysterious landing of a boat to take off the black men with the great basket. But we of the *Pearl* were very careful not to repeat to Cambon anything of Amos's mention of the voodoo. Such a blow to let strike a parent, we felt, would serve no purpose.

Let us pass over those hours of preparation for the sailing in pursuit of the schooner *Josephine*.

Monsieur Cambon, accompanied by his daughter, Josephine, came with us to the boat, to give last expression of gratitude and God speed. Miss Josephine pulled me aside for a word. Her face was pale, and a wild look was in her eyes as they gazed into mine.

"You go after him!" She meant it for a question, though she gave it the form of an accusation.

I made no denial.

"He did not steal Marie!" she said, her tone expressing a wish rather than a conviction. I could see that she, even, now had begun to doubt, for she knew, too, that Mordaunt had stolen away under cover of night.

"I am convinced he did," I asserted.

Her face became more pale. "Oh, tell me!" she said.

I considered a moment; then decided that it would be a kindness, if I could cure her of her belief in this man. Pledging her to secrecy I then told her Rufe's story of Amos, though carefully omitting any mention of the voodoo. I believe she matched other circumstances with what I had to say, to the end that conviction was stealing into her heart. Finally she spoke.

"Oh, I didn't want to believe!" she said. "Oh, I hope he will die!"

And she turned away.

It was at four bells of the morning watch (ten o'clock) that we sailed out of Kingston harbor. We set our course to the east in spite of the fact that the mysterious boat had landed to the west, beyond Portland Point; the home of the voodoo was to the east, not to the west. He who was our guide living, was still our guide, though dead. Indeed there seemed almost ground for believing that his spirit continued to direct us, on a number of occasions, when we were completely at a loss.

Madame Marat had remained in Kingston; so the *Pearl* company consisted of Grant Norris, Jean Marat, Julian Lamartine, Rufe, Ray Reid, Robert Murtry, and myself, not to mention the sailors, forward.

When we had passed Morant Point, Captain Marat set the course east northeast. We aimed for the home of the voodoo. It was the only clue we had. At midnight we sighted the white flash of an

island light; it was day when we passed the towering rock. Then at last the peaks of the great island we sought began to creep up out of the sea. The great jumbled mass of rocks came even nearer, spreading out as if to engulf us, till, on the following day we dropped anchor off the city.

It was not a cheerful passage, this from island to island. Even Ray had been caught in the general gloom. We had time, each severally, during these two days, to come, by reflection, to a realization of the apparent hopelessness of our task. Beyond the almost haphazard selection of this one large port as our first point of contact, we had no plan. While the query, – what next? was uppermost in the minds of each, he dreaded to hear another – every other – confess that he did not know. For of necessity he *could* not know. And so, when we moved in, in that late afternoon, seeking a suitable anchorage, every eye – independently – sought out every sail within view, only half daring to hope for a sight of a vessel that should appear to be the *Josephine*.

When everything had been made snug above deck, and the harbor officials had made their visit, dusk was on. No move could be made until morning. And then came supper. All lingered at the table, knowing that the time had come for a council of war. It was Norris who volunteered to open the ball.

"Well comrades," he began, seeking to be cheerful, "I suppose we'll now have to decide on a fresh start. How are we going to find out if the *Josephine* is here?"

"Well," said Captain Marat, "If she have not change her name, that will be easy."

Captain Marat had hit on the thing that was troubling us all. The man Mordaunt, we knew, had at one time changed the name of his vessel to honor her whom he had hoped to make his wife, and now he might have two reasons for making another change in name: He had been disappointed in his hope, and there was the criminal reason – for concealment. None had taken any note of the schooner, and Monsieur Cambon's description of the vessel made a picture that answered for almost any schooner yacht of dimensions a little greater than the *Pearl*.

It was also unfortunate that none of us had set eyes on this man Mordaunt. But Monsieur Cambon had been able to give us one characteristic of the man that might go far toward identifying him, should we be fortunate enough to encounter him under favorable conditions. Cambon described him as of medium though strong build; of finely chiseled, rather handsome features; black eyes, black hair, which he wore a little long and which was disposed to curl. His manners Cambon described as studiously polished, if self-assertive. But the single characteristic that interested me most was a certain mannerism.

"Sometimes," M. Cambon had said, "when he is unconscious of his surroundings, deeply cogitating on something, he will take the lobe of his ear between thumb and finger, pulling or stroking – like when others scratch the head when they are puzzled."

It took us but a short time to determine on a course. Some were to go in a small boat among the many ships of the harbor, while others should visit the city. We spent an hour on deck, breathing the balmy air, and watching the many lights of the ships and the city. There, too, was the revolving red light on Point Lomentin, and the green light, set in by the city.

We were early astir, all eager to be doing. Ray and Julian went with Grant Norris to sail about the harbor, to seek news of the *Josephine*; Robert and myself, with Captain Marat, rowed to a wharf of the city. It was verily a city of blacks. Mulattoes were few, and we walked up and down numerous streets before we found a white man whose appearance encouraged us. He was a Frenchman, seated before an apothecary shop. The smile on his thin smooth-shaven face invited us to stop. He and Captain Marat were directly in conversation, in the tongue they knew best.

The Frenchman gave us his name – Jules Sevier – and had us into his shop, with its many bottles of patent medicines, in rows. He and Marat sipped French wine while they continued their talk. At last the apothecary turned to Robert and myself.

"Ah," he said, "I am 'fraid you have one ver' deeficult task. But I am glad you fin' your way to me. I will help you all I can."

It developed that he knew nothing of either the schooner *Josephine* or M. Mordaunt, or anyone to fit the description Marat was able to give him. But after listening to the recital of the circumstances (set about the disappearance of little Marie Cambon) he said, – "Oui, oui! it was thad man. Such things like thad have happen more times than the world think. You have come to the right place."

Jules Sevier at the last told us that he would make some private inquiries, and advised that we come back on the following day to learn the results.

We were soon in our boat, somewhat cheered by the bit of encouragement we'd got, alloyed as it was.

"I think it's a good sign," declared Robert, "that we went so straight to that man. He can help us if anybody can."

Robert was something of a fatalist you see.

"Yes, he know ver' much about the voodoo," said Jean Marat.

We boarded the *Pearl*, to wait several hours before the others showed up. When they drew near we could see that they had been unsuccessful. They had found no schooner of the name sought, nor any with a newly painted name.

"Of course," said Norris, "she might be lying hid behind some small island, or point, miles away, and it will take anyway a week to find out."

CHAPTER IV
WE PICK UP THE TRAIL

In the morning all but Rufe went to shore. Rufe would have none of it.

"Say," he said, when Ray offered to remain aboard in his place, "say, you-all, you ain't guine git dis niggah in dat town to be voodooed by dem heathen niggahs. Hum-n! An' I ain't got no rabbit-fut, nor nuthing."

Julian, Ray, and Norris went sight-seeing, while Marat, Robert, and I made our way to the apothecary shop.

Jules Sevier greeted us.

"I ver' sorry I have no news for you," he said. "There is one, I could not find, who have a son who carry the mail, and know ver' much of thees country. Maybe tomorrow she weel be home, and we can learn sometheeng."

He ushered us into the shop, where there awaited us a black woman of middle age, who, Sevier said, would tell us a tale that we would travel far to find a match for. She could speak only in the French; so Jean Marat got her tale, which he interpreted for Robert and myself.

Her husband had been a voodoo devotee; but twelve years ago he had been induced to renounce the worship, and turn to one of the Christian denominations. One of his old associates contrived to introduce into his food one of the poisons so well known to the voodoo.

The man died.

The authorities insisted on his immediate burial. The poor widow had gone to visit his grave on the following day, only to find his empty coffin, beside the opened grave. The body was gone. The remains were found, however, hours later, with the heart and lungs removed. She said she then was convinced poison had been given him to put him in a trance, and that the voodoo worshipers had exhumed him a few hours after burial, and resuscitated him, to obtain the living blood for admixture with the rum, and to take the heart for a voodoo feast.

When the woman had gone, Jules Sevier told us that he was prepared to escort some one of us to witness an actual voodoo ceremonial that very night. He assured us that by reason of the nearness of the locality to the city, our sensibilities would be subjected to no greater shock than to witness the sacrifice of fowls. We none of us confessed to over much curiosity, even for so mild a show; but in this quest we were on, some more actual knowledge of these practices might stand us in good stead.

It fell to me to be Sevier's companion on the excursion; and I returned alone, at dusk, to take supper with him, and prepare for the show. The apothecary assured me that if we were to go as white men, we should see little to our purpose, since it would then be necessary to depart before any important part of the ceremonial should begin. So he brought into a back-room certain grease-paints, and a pair of black, woolly wigs, and two outfits – jackets, trousers, and hats, – of the same nondescript style that I had seen on the streets of the city.

He set to work to help me to smear and rig myself first; and when the operation was complete he set a glass before me. I was shocked at the spectacle, and I set to, to rubbing my wrist, to see if this black stain might not be permanent, so natural did it appear. It refused to rub off. Sevier saw my embarrassment, and laughingly assured me that any tallow would take it off.

We passed out at the back, into the dark, and made our way through the streets. The rows of unattractive buildings with their second story balconies, shallow and overhanging, were like the pictures I'd seen of the Chinatown of a great city. The stench from the gutters was nauseating, the heat stifling. We had presently passed the outskirts of the city, and were treading a rough road.

For some time I had been cocking my ear to a distant sound. It began as a scarcely discernible rumble; then it would swell to a roar, as of an approaching storm, and die away, and then swell again,

and then fall away again, in a most improper and bewildering fashion. The blackened apothecary at my side informed me that it was the *Ka*– the voodoo drum, and that I should presently see the drummer. When we had covered some above a mile of this road, the drummer seemed to have taken his instrument and gone some considerable distance away, for the rumble had now become scarce audible. But my conductor informed me it was a peculiarity of the thing that it was heard with greater distinctness at a distance than when near by; and so the lesser sound was evidence that we were drawing near our goal. The skin over my spine was becoming a bit creepy. The ghostly palms looked down on us, and seemed to whisper things. If I had been alone I am quite sure I should have turned back. In an interval between the rumblings of the drum I heard a cricket, and that familiar sound gave me some comfort.

Then at last we made out a great fire ahead, and between us and the leaping flames were many dusky figures, grotesquely capering. As we approached we saw that one or two were already in a frenzy of excitement, and there was constant drinking. Then I made out the drummer. He was sitting astride of what appeared to be a cask, his fingers playing upon the end. The dancers seemed as if they would fly into the tree-tops with ecstacy, at each swelling of the sound.

We two kept well out in the shadows, till all of that hundred or more of blacks seemed to have reached the height of intoxication; then we moved in. Finally the dancing ceased, and an old crone in a red robe mounted a rude platform, taking her place beside the snake-box.

She first addressed the mob; and then each worshiper in turn came forward, spoke words, and lay some offering before the box. My companion whispered me the explanation that they were asking favors. The old crone – the *mamaloi*– set her ear to the box, and gave out the answers, one by one.

All now crowded close, as the *mamaloi* seized a white rooster by the head in the one hand, flashing a knife in the other. A sweep of the blade, and the black devotees directly were mixing blood with the rum in their cups, which they drank. Fowl after fowl followed the first, and all presently found their way into pots for cooking. And the wild caperings recommenced with the drinking, and the shouting, and all.

I began to sicken of the spectacle; and then I noted suspicious eyes taking us in. It was then Jules Sevier whispered me – "Come, it is time we go now." And so we slipped off in the shadows.

The drum ceased its rumble, and the tree-frogs began their warble; to which music I trod the dark road with a lighter step. "They will keep on," said Sevier, "till they be exhaust', or ver' drunk, and then they fall, and sleep all the day."

Certain odors of the dank vegetation filled my nostrils; similar odors ever after have served to recall the spectacle I had witnessed that night.

The city was quiet; the populace seemed all to be sleeping. The howling of some cats was all the sound we heard as we threaded the streets.

Soon we were busied with removing the black stain from our skins. The operation consumed nearly an hour – with the fats, the soap, and the rubbing. And then I was lighted to my bed by Sevier.

We were at breakfast, when there arrived at the back door the mother of the mail carrier, that Sevier had told us of. The apothecary had her in, and questioned her while we ate. She had no knowledge of any Monsieur Mordaunt, but her son had often made mention of one Duran, a white man, of the north coast, who was much abroad in his schooner yacht, and who had, many years back, come suddenly into untold wealth. It was said the source was wealthy connections in France.

"Ah, thad is your man!" said Jules Sevier, when he had repeated to me what the woman told. "Thad is your man. Duran he is on this island, Mordaunt w'en he is in Jamaica, or where not."

In an hour, appeared Captain Marat and Robert. While they were not a little entertained by the account of my last night's experiences, they found greater interest in the news of the morning.

"We're on his trail now," declared Robert.

"Yes," agreed Marat. "Now it weel not be hard to find heem, I theenk."

But Jules Sevier had a word to say. He spoke rapidly in French with Jean Marat for some minutes; then he turned to Robert and myself.

"I have explain' to Captain Marat," he said, "thad eet will not do to spik weeth the authorities about thees matter. The authorities are too much in the voodoo themselv'. You weel have to keep quiet about thees business, except w'en you know with whom you spik. The voodoo are ver' strong in thee government here."

Sevier left his shop in the care of an assistant, and accompanied us to the shore. He gave us much valuable information about the region to which we were going, and advice as to our dealing with the natives. Before we stepped into the boat he held out a small parcel to me.

"Here is some supply of the paint," he said, "and the two black wigs. They may be of use to you, if you go back in the country. Remember these people ver' suspicious of white men."

It was with some relish that we up anchor and away from that city of stenches. The heat was oppressive, of which we got some relief when well out to sea.

What with squalls, followed by dead calms, which in turn flung us about, and then held us much off our course, it was some days before the *Pearl* finally approached the land again, this time on the north coast of this island of towering peaks.

We delayed the noon meal until we had cast our anchor within the sheltering reefs. Our first care was to search the harbor for some vessel answering the description of the *Josephine*, owner M. Duran. And we were in no doubt that Duran and Mordaunt were one and the same. Both our boats were lowered, and manned by two parties of searchers: Captain Marat, Ray, and Robert went in one, Grant Norris, Julian Lamartine, and myself set off in the other. There were sailing vessels a plenty in the harbor, but not one whose appearance touched our present interest. But when our boat returned to the *Pearl*, the three of us a bit dejected over our non-success, we found the others awaiting us, and having a different story. They had not found the schooner we sought, but they had at any rate come across news of her. Captain Marat had chanced to speak with the first officer of a steamer in from Kingston on the day before.

"This man say," exclaimed Captain Marat, "thad w'en the steamer come in, he see the *Josephine*, which he recognize to have seen in Kingston harbor, and she have a new name painted on —*Orion*. An' ver' soon after, he see the *Orion* sail away out of the harbor."

At this last bit I felt my heart fall.

"Don't cry yet, Wayne," said Ray, "wait till you hear the rest."

And then Jean Marat went on to relate how he had continued his inquiries, with the result that he had found a sailor whose vessel had lain near the *Orion* and who told of seeing a white man of the *Orion* go to shore in a boat, into which had been put a basket of unusual proportions. This sailor had been quite sure that the white man had not returned aboard when the schooner *Orion* had sailed away.

We were all now in a flutter of excitement; it was the recollection of the story of the big basket that had been taken aboard the boat, together with the two blacks, beyond Portland Point, in Jamaica. Whatever doubts we had held of our being on the right track were thus dispelled.

Night had fallen quickly while we talked, all squatting in a circle on the deck. I could hear Rufe mumbling to himself, and rattling pans in the galley. The sailors, leaning on the rail, forward, were watching the lights of the city.

"We have now only to find Mordaunt – or Duran – and the big basket," said Julian. "It looks like everybody notices that basket."

"Yes, that is the first step," agreed Norris. "But that city over there is big, and there's no telling when this Duran will throw the basket aside."

"Yes," said Robert, "when he gets the little one among the voodoo folks he won't have any more use for the basket."

"Say!" broke in Ray, "I don't believe a man can turn over a little kid to the voodoos to be killed that way, unless he's a voodoo himself. This Mordaunt – Duran, or whatever his name is – is just

bluffing, to make the Cambons give in to him. All he wants is to set up housekeeping, with Miss Josephine Cambon as Mrs. Duran."

"Ah, no," said Captain Jean Marat, "this man have mix' blood; ver' many of the mulatto' are ver' cruel; and mos' of these men who have ver' near all white blood are the mos' cruel. They like best of anything to have vengeance. The more exquisite they can make the suffering of others, the more exquisite the pleasure they feel."

I had been very late dropping off to sleep, troubled as I was with thoughts of little Marie and her danger. It seemed I had barely closed my eyes, when Rufe came beating a pan about our ears. "De sun soon up," he said. "Dey ain' no mo' sleep foh de weary."

The light was already on the mountain peaks; and soon the sun leaped into view. Cool breezes came from the hills, carrying the heavy vegetal odors from the forests.

Early the *Pearl* was abandoned by all except Rufe (who refused to go ashore) and two black sailors. We separated into parties of two, to search the city. It was Robert Murtry who paired with me this day.

We passed up one street and down another, hour after hour, in this search for one whom we had never set eyes on. It was much as if we were dependent on instinct to spot our man, should we meet up with him. Unfortunately we were a good deal conspicuous because of our color.

At noon Robert and I munched the lunch we carried, and so continued along street after street of this large but unattractive city, with its uncouth, wooden structures.

At last, far up the street we glimpsed a white man. We hurried after him, but lost him at a second turning.

The afternoon was better than half gone, when there stepped out from a house, almost treading on our toes, a white man who seemed startled at the sight of us. He passed on down the way we had come. We moved on a few steps and looked back, to see that our man had also turned, and was observing us. A few yards more brought us to a tight-board fence. When the man's head was turned, I pulled Robert through a gap and so got us behind the board screen. We contrived to get a peep down the street, and soon observed our man retracing his steps. We were each at a knot-hole when he came near.

And then it was I experienced a thrill of conquest. The man had stopped in an attitude of wonder. At once his hand went to his ear, and he pulled gently and intermittently at the lobe of it, while he continued to puzzle over the thing that was in his mind.

Here was our man at last. How fortunate that he had possessed that mannerism! It was rather a well-formed, swarthy face he had, clear-cut features, and hair that curled. I do not know if it was what I knew of him, but I seemed to see something sinister in his aspect.

He stepped toward that opening in our fence. For the moment I was in panic; there was no time to dodge into the shed at the back. Then I whipped out my pocket-knife, and Robert and I were at a game of "mumble the peg," when we felt the man's eyes upon us. We were careful not to look up. He must have stood there observing us for about the space of a minute, and then we heard his step as he went his way. We sprang to the break in the fence and cautiously peeked. He looked back at frequent intervals as he walked down the street.

"Well, he's spotted us," said Robert. "How can we follow him?"

"We'll just have to do it anyway," I answered. "It's our only chance."

We stepped out boldly, making some effort to reduce the space between the man Duran and ourselves, all the while, endeavoring by playful punches at one another to make it appear that we had no more serious purpose than to pass the time of a holiday.

Presently the man turned off the street, disappearing from our sight.

"There he goes!" said we both together; and we darted off, one after the other. When we reached the place where our quarry had made his turn, we looked in vain down the side street. He

was nowhere in view. On each of the two corners stood a two-story house with the usual shallow balcony above the walk.

"He may have gone into one of these houses," suggested Robert.

"Yes," I agreed, "and he may be watching us now."

From a point of vantage we watched for above an hour; but our man did not again appear.

"Well," I finally began, "he's given us the slip. We can't do better than go hunt up the others."

We were anything but dejected, for we had discovered the region of one of Duran's haunts.

We had not long to wait at the wharf, and our friends were much interested in the tale we spun them.

"It's plain enough that fellow suspected you were looking for him," declared Norris. "It wasn't just ordinary curiosity made him go back to see what you were up to."

"We must loose no time," pressed Captain Marat. "Some of us who' he have not see' can watch for thees Duran."

And now came the return of Robert and myself to the street of our adventure, accompanied by Jean Marat and Ray, to whom we pointed out the place where we had last seen Duran, by which name I shall now call him. Then, leaving Marat and Ray on the watch, we returned to join the others, and go aboard the schooner. It was considered needful to make some provision for a possible sojourn ashore for some part of our company.

"I sho' is glad you-all is come back," Rufe greeted us, as we climbed aboard. "Some o' dem heathen voodoo niggars has been a' circumvallatin' aroun' dis heah ship."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Norris.

"Jes' what I say," returned Rufe. "Less'n two hours ago Neb come to me an' says dey's a boat a comin'. I goes out, an' I see four o' dem niggars a rowin' dis way, jes' like dey fixed to come on board. I goes in afte' mah shot-gun, and I lays it on de roof, so's dey kin see it; an' when dey is close, I says: 'I reckon you-all better not come too close to dis heah ship.' Dey seems kin' o' s'prised, an' eyein' dat gun, and hol'n back wid dere oars. Den one o' dem niggars up an' says: 'Whar is you-all from?' And I says – 'We's from de good ole U. S., I reckon.' He says – 'Ain' you been in Kingston?'

"I begin to smell dat rat, an' I say to myself dat dese here niggars is from dat schooner we is lookin' foh, an' dey's come to git wisdom.

"I scratch my head, an' say – 'Kickston – Kickston – if dey is a town in de U. S. by dat name, I ain' heered of it.' He says, 'No, Kickston, dat's in Jamaica.' I say, 'Oh, I reckon you mean de kick dat's in de rum. No we ain' got no Jamaica rum wid no kicks by de ton in it – we ain' got no rum at all; dis here ship is strictly temperance.'"

"Well, did that satisfy him?" laughed Norris.

"Not 'zactly," returned Rufe, "He wanted to know whar we-all was a goin', and I tol' him dat depend on de wind an' how de 'maggot bite' – we ain't got no sailin' orders, 'zactly. And den he seem plumb disgusted, an' dey rows away widout no t'anks foh all de wisdom I give um."

"Well, did you see what way their boat went?" I asked.

"Yes, sah," said Rufe, "I got de glasses, an' I wach um row way up de shore to de east, I reckon way outside de town."

"It's plain enough," began Norris. "That man, Duran, has had his eyes on us, and sent those blacks out to confirm his suspicions that we had followed from Kingston."

"And I'll bet," offered Robert, "that he sent them since Wayne and I saw him, and that he is now a long way from that place where we left Captain Marat and Ray on watch."

Night had come on while we talked. Rufe set a meal before us, and while we supped we had new meat for discussion. It was part of the information we got of Jules Sevier that criminal voodooism was practiced only back in the hills. It was plain, then, that the trail must finally lead us somewhere beyond the city. And what more reasonable than to conclude that Duran's blacks had gone that way in their

boat? It was there then, we must seek little Marie Cambon. And it was then I made the suggestion that Robert and I should follow that trail alone, if we found that it pointed inland.

As expected, Marat and Ray had got no news of the man, Duran. Captain Marat, however, had got into talk with a mulatto, of whom he drew the information that the part of the city in which we had come upon Duran was a hot-bed of the city voodoo, whose practices were said to be of a moderate nature. It was well back in the hills that voodooism went full swing.

Captain Marat fell in with Robert's and my plan to take up the trail on land, alone, if occasion should come; and he helped us with our equipment. We would have with us our little rifles and some fishing tackle. If the trail should lead us into the country a dove or two, and some fish, now and then, might prove welcome additions to our grub-sacks.

CHAPTER V
WE GAIN AN ALLY

It was an hour before dawn that we pushed away from the schooner in one of the boats; Captain Marat, Grant Norris, Ray, Robert and myself. We passed among the sleeping vessels with their white night-lights showing aloft.

The harbor light still continued its revolutions, sending bright rays out over the sea. Norris and Ray were at the oars. The land breeze was cool; there was little sound except the swish of the oars. But as we moved on down the shore, presently there came the night sounds from the country, frogs' voices in the ascendent. Then all at once, it seemed, light burst on the high peaks of the mountains; in a few minutes it was full day. The royal palm and cocoanut trees lined the shore, curving out over the sand beach.

We came opposite two boats on the white sand; and a pair of huts showed above the bushy growth. Here we went to shore. Jean Marat entered into talk with some black children who had appeared on the beach at our approach. Did white men ever land there? he asked. No, no white man had been there for ever so long – years. Did black sailors ever land there? Yes, two the evening before. "And oh yes, two days – three days before, some black men came in a boat with – oh, such a big basket! Two men carry the basket and go back in the country." There was but one road or trail, going any distance back. There was a small village a few hours walk toward the hills.

I felt my heart leap with hope at the mention of the basket. And yet I was never destined to hear of it again.

"It looks like we're on the right trail," said Norris, when Jean Marat had interpreted for us the last statement of the little blacks.

"Yes," said Marat. "And now," he added, turning to Robert and me, "you still feel you weesh to go, only you two together?"

"Yes," I answered for us both. "As you have admitted, we two alone won't attract so much attention. And then we have the black wigs and paint. If we get up in the hills and need you we can signal."

Our equipment made but a small pack each. The rifles we bore in their canvas cases.

"Now, boys," cautioned Marat, when we stood among the cocoanut palms at the beginning of the path, "now, boys, go ver' slow and ver' careful. W'en you have find thee place – if you are so fortunate, just come for us."

"Or if you get up on the side of one of those mountains," broke in Ray, "you can signal us at night."

"And look here," began Norris, "if signalling is going to be that easy, you let us know how things are going – before the third day, or by all that's holy! I'll be hiking after you to see what's up."

Grant Norris was not one that was used to holding back while others were doing, he was always eager to be in the forefront of the fray.

"Well you can depend on it, Norris," I assured him, "we'll not delay letting you know, when we've located them."

And so, after a shake of the hand all round, Robert and I plunged into the brush. Cocoanut palms and cabbage palms leaned over our path; the sweet odor of orange blossoms delighted our nostrils. Beyond the second of the cottages – a palm-thatched ajoupa – the ragged leaves of banana plants gave an added touch to the tropic scene. A mile or more back from the beach, the trail took us into open country; here tall grass bordered the way.

Two leisurely hours of tramping had brought us again among the trees. The ground became broken, and we had some stiff climbs. And then at last we came upon a wee bit of a village. There

were dwellings of various descriptions; some were of stone, most seemed to be of palm-thatch. And there were numbers of children, though none who could understand two words of English. But they pointed a way toward the hilly side of the hamlet, as if to indicate that that way we should find something in our line. And at last we came upon one who could make something of our speech.

In the midst of a cluster of palms stood a stone cottage, better kept than any we'd passed; and the garden showed straighter rows. While Robert and I stood contemplating the scene, there came from the back, a woman; black, like all the rest, but with superior features and an intelligent eye.

"Yes, sar, I speak the English," she answered our inquiry.

We began with no fuller explanation than that we were strangers; but she invited us to a seat on a bench in a cool arbor at the back, and before we could protest, she had up a small table and dishes of food.

One thing leads to another in talk, and it was not long till it became plain that our hostess was in no sort of sympathy with the voodoo.

"It is very horrible, the things they do," she said. And she told of a neighbor who had lost a child at the hands of the voodoo worshipers less than two months gone. "If it was not for my brother, Carlos, I would leave thees island," she said.

And thus it came about that we finally confided to this woman the purpose of our visit to the region, telling her the story of the kidnapping of the Cambon child, making mention of Mordaunt, alias Duran, and all.

She showed much excitement while she listened, and when we had finished, she spoke with vehemence.

"Oh, thad Duran!" she said. "Ah, my brother, he will help you. Wait till Carlos come. I cannot explain now, but he will be very glad to help you."

Carlos was gone to the city on some marketing errand, and would be back by night, she said.

And so we lay aside our packs, and, to while away the time, set off to explore the region, a mile or so farther inland. Our hostess warned us to keep aloof from an old ruin of a palace we were likely to see on our tramp. The place, she said, had a bad name. The natives had it that the old ruin was now the abode of *zombis* (devils); and there were stories of men who had gone to explore the place and had never returned. Some of the stories were fanciful, she admitted, but she had herself seen one man return nursing a bullet wound, and who had refused to talk of his experience, and had gone away never to return.

Robert and I moved on up the valley, curious for a look at this tabooed ruin. The path for some time led through heavy forest growth, where was a perfect tangle of lianas, running from ground to tree, and tree to tree, in a great network.

Presently we came to an open space. Robert was ahead.

"There she is," he said, pointing.

The ground sloped away, down to the left hand of our path. The forest trees hid the bottom of the valley – a big ravine I prefer to call it – and over there, over-topping the trees on the other side of the valley, a mile away, loomed a wonderful structure – or the ruins of one.

For a minute we gazed in speechless wonder.

The air was clear, and from our high vantage point we could see with unusual distinctness the high walls of each story which seemed to rise a wide step behind that of the story below. Flanking a great arched portal at the ground, either side rose wide stone buttressed terraces, zigzagging in their ascent. The top – the fourth or fifth story of the palace showed only crumbling walls, and trees grew up there, evidently rooted in the crevices. And one tree, I saw, poked its head through a window opening. The grandeur and bizarre beauty of the structure made it seem like a chapter out of "Arabian Nights Entertainments."

"Who'd think to see a thing like that here!" I said.

"I'd like to get inside of it," said Robert. And I saw it was a hope he expressed.

"And what about the devils that live there?" I quizzed him, though I had the same thought as he.

"I don't take any stock in that part of those stories," said Robert – "Any more than you do," he added, studying my face.

"Well, suppose we try getting a little closer," I said.

So we again took up the march, now moving down into the ravine. When we had crossed the open ground, we found a way into the tangled growth. It was apparently an old, though now unused, path, that must have been cut through the forest with much labor. When we reached the stream, it was at a shallow fording; and then we ascended the other side of the ravine by a path, grass overgrown like that of the descent. Seldom would we see more than fifty feet in front, so close was the growth, and winding the path.

We moved silently, the effort of the climb taking all our breath. When we had gone what we judged to be some over half the distance to the palace, we came to a halt, to rest, and to consider. We had hoped that by this time we should have come to a close view of the structure. But there was yet no sign of a break in the trees.

"Perhaps if we go a little farther we'll come to some opening," suggested Robert.

Directly, the slope of ascent became more gentle, and we went with greater ease. But we were soon brought to a sudden halt. We had just made a sharp turn of the path, when we came upon a bleached human skull, fixed in the notch of a tree. Below it were nailed two long bones. They evidently were meant to be crossed, though now they lay almost parallel, doubtless due to the giving way of some rusty support. The skull was small, apparently that of a child; and the sight was not cheerful.

"It's a warning," I whispered.

Robert nodded agreement, and then there was a question in his eyes.

"Better try it a little farther," I said.

And so we moved on cautiously. The trees were very tall and very close set together, making the wood very dark, where not so much as a fly buzzed. I was debating whether to call a halt, when the light of open ground showed ahead. By way of caution I pulled Robert with me off the path to the right; there might be danger in the path; and we crawled through the heavy undergrowth and tangle of lianas to the edge of the forest.

When we looked out across the open it was to find ourselves almost under the walls of that great ruin. The tooth of decay had gnawed big gaps in the top parts, but the lower stories still boasted a sound fabric; and might even be habitable. What a place to play in!

But we got a rough awakening from our dreaming contemplation: There came the sudden crack of a gun, and the ball whizzed close over our heads, causing us to drop flat on the ground and wriggle away lively into the underbrush.

For above a quarter of an hour we crouched in our burrow, not daring to move, or even converse in a whisper. Then, with infinite labor and extreme caution, we finally worked our way back to the path, down which we trotted, half expecting a shot from some ambush.

We had just passed the ford at the bottom of the ravine when we were startled by the sudden appearance of a black directly in our path.

It proved to be Carlos, the brother of our hostess, who had come in search of us. When we had recited our adventure he was inclined to scold.

"Id is ver' danger' to go to thad place," he said, "Melie say she tell you about thad."

The shadows already covered the open spaces and it was night when we came to the cottage of Carlos and Melie Brill.

Carlos told us that he had got it of friends in the city that M. Duran's schooner had been in the harbor.

"And where did the schooner go that he did not go with it?" I asked.

"Oh, the schooner she go not so ver' far," said Carlos. "She hide in one bay not ver' far away, I guess."

We had not spoken long with Carlos Brill, till it became plain that in his mind this man, Duran, was associated with some kind of emotion, and it was equally plain that that emotion could not be given the name of love. The real nature and source of this sentiment he seemed disposed to keep to himself; though he was in no pains to make us believe that his willingness to help us was entirely disinterested.

Melie Brill had a meal prepared. The chief dish was a soup, as she called it; carrots, yams, pumpkins, turnips, bananas, salt pork, and pimentos, boiled all together. Pineapple and bananas made the desert. Our host gave us to understand we were already installed, as of the household. They would listen to no other way of it.

These two, brother and sister, were not much of a kind with their neighbors. It was plain, dark as they were, they were of some mixed blood, it was shown in the features and hair, which was straight, not even deigning to curl.

Before we had finished our supper there appeared the black neighbor who had so recently lost a child to the voodoo. She seemed to have sensed, in some manner, the purpose of our visit, for she wished Robert and me all kinds of success. This was interpreted to us by Melie Brill, for the woman had only the West Indian-French. She gave me a kind of fetish; it was of some very hard wood, the shape of a bird, bill and tail, and the thickness of a marble. She said that within was a drop of blood of a great wizard, and that it would preserve me from a violent death (and so from the attacks of the *zombis*) and would insure success in my undertakings. She was soon gone, for it is the practice among all the natives to retire to bed early.

The desire to press our business was upon Robert and myself, and we put a number of questions. We desired to know who they were who inhabited the ruined palace, and who it could have been who fired the shot at us over there.

"I do not know who it is who stay there," Carlos answered, "an' I do not know who fire' the shot."

"Don't you think it's that man, Duran, who makes that his headquarters?" I pressed.

Carlos exchanged a look with his sister before he spoke. "I have suspect for some time, that Duran he keep there, when he not away in hees schooner," he said. "I have think that for two year."

"Hasn't anyone seen him around there?" queried Robert.

"No," returned Carlos. "No one have seen any white man that way, but I suspect Duran he go there."

"Then," I asked, "do you think that's where he has hidden little Marie Cambon?"

"Yes, ver' like'," said Carlos.

Further talk only strengthened our conviction. Next we required of Carlos to guide us to a barren hillside – some spot in range of the harbor, so many miles below. This Carlos professed to be easy of accomplishment.

We went the way we had been in the afternoon. The forest was of an inky blackness; even the stars could seldom be seen from the path. Carlos had no trouble to keep the road. A perfect hush was over everything until the night birds and frogs tuned up to show that the world was not dead.

When we got out into that open space, instinctively we turned our eyes across the valley in the direction of the mysterious palace. And then, as if for our particular benefit, a light flashed over there. It disappeared in the same moment, only to appear again, perhaps at another point near. Again it went out, and though we waited some minutes, it showed no more.

"There's some one there, sure enough," observed Robert.

"Thee people here have see' the light many times," said Carlos. "They theenk it is the *zombis*."

"I guess Duran is the king Zombi," said Robert.

Carlos laughed. "I theenk you right," he said.

We passed through another patch of forest and climbed to a ledge on the steep hillside. To gather a pile of wood was the work of but five minutes. Then we set it akindle.

Using our jackets for a screen, we began to signal, alternately covering and exposing our fire. Our friends on the *Pearl* must have kept a good watch, for hardly two minutes had passed, till we made out an answering signal.

"Ray is on the job," said Robert.

Then I spelled out, in short and long flashes, the following words:

Good So Far.

Then came from the sea the terse acknowledgment: O.K.

"That ought to hold Norris," said Robert.

"Yes, till tomorrow night," I returned. "If we don't signal them again tomorrow night, Norris will be piling up here hand over foot."

Carlos had been very quiet, taken up with watching our procedure. That mode of communication was far from unknown to him, but it seemed to him marvelous that white folk should use it. But the wonder of it all was that we could spell out any words we pleased in that way.

"An' if you tell your frien's to come, they weel come?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered, "they will come, in a hurry."

That somehow seemed to please Carlos; and he became pensive. We had put out the fire and were already on our way back through the black forest. When we came again to the open space, we stopped for near half an hour, in the hope that we might again have a sight of the mysterious light over at the old ruin.

While we squatted on the ground, watching, my mind was taken up with the problem of how to discover where little Marie Cambon was hid; and would our little handful of men be sufficient to storm the place? I put the questions to Carlos.

"No – No!" declared Carlos, "the voodoos are too many, and they watch ver' careful, as you have find out."

He referred to our being fired on.

"Wait till tomorrow, then maybe I fin' out sometheeng," he said.

Carlos and his sister made us a pallet in the arbor at the back.

CHAPTER VI
WE BREAK UP THE VOODOO CEREMONIAL

Carlos was gone when Robert and I awoke. Melie told us he had gone off early on our business, and had left word that we were to lay close, till he returned.

Our excursion over to that old ruin of a palace, we were to learn, had been a bit rash. In fact, before the morning was gone, the woman who had given me the fetish came over to report that black men had been about, with inquiries as to the movements of the two white boys.

Carlos turned up at noon. He had been angling among some of the lesser voodoo devotees. There was no news of any white child being held for sacrifice; but there had been passed word of a big voodoo ceremonial to take place either this night or the next. The place was some ten miles back in the hills.

"Some of the voodoos near here have gone from their home'," he said, "an' some more make ready to go."

The news was disturbing. I had no doubt that a big voodoo ceremonial could mean nothing less than that there was to be the offering of the "goat without horns." And here, too, was the big voodoo doings to follow close upon the arrival of Duran with little Marie Cambon.

And what was to do? Call our friends from the *Pearl*? Manifestly, we could not bring so many whites into the region without attracting attention. Duran would be forewarned, and so our purpose defeated. We two must continue to go it alone, trust to luck and our own devices. And there was our new ally, Carlos Brill.

"We must go and see what's going on," I said to Carlos, "and if it's ten miles, we must start soon."

"Oh, if we go before dark," returned Carlos, "and some one see white boys, they – "

"We have a cure for that," I interrupted. "You'll see, we'll fool them."

Robert and I got our packs together, to which we added some small pieces of clothing that I begged of Carlos. Soon we stood all fixed for a long march.

"And now," said I to Carlos, "you and Melie are to come a short way with us to bid us goodbye, for it is to be understood that we are going back the way we came. But then you are to keep watch on the brush; and if you hear the whistle of a bird you're to come over quietly and meet us."

"Yes, yes," nodded Carlos, comprehending.

And so Carlos and Melie walked with us till we were in the midst of the village; and there we shook hands as we parted, and again waved a goodbye, as we moved out of view, numbers of curious blacks looking on.

When we had gone a mile or more seaward, we turned aside; and from a screen of brush, we watched the path for a quarter of an hour, for possible followers.

"Do you think there were any of the voodoo, there?" questioned Robert at last.

"Perhaps not," I answered, "but they'll soon hear of our going."

We picked a suitable spot in the brush, and set up our dressing room. Forth came the kinky, black wigs, and paints given us by Jules Sevier. We worked on one another, turn about. At the end of twenty minutes I set the wig on Robert's head. The result was satisfactory. His color was a dusky brown, all but black. A few minutes drying, and the stain refused to rub off.

"Bob, you are pretty," I told him. "I'll defy Rufe to know you."

"I'll say the same for you, Wayne," said he. "Even Ray wouldn't know *you*."

A jacket and a jumper, and an old hat, got of Carlos, and a twist and turn to Robert's slouch cover, completed our make-up.

Going back, we skirted the village on the west. We came in time into the brush back of the Brill hut.

A whistled bird-call brought Carlos. When he put aside the bush and stepped into view, that moment his face was a picture – his mind contending between the certainty of our identity and doubt of his eyes.

"Ah," he began, "that is ver' suprise'. How you do it?" And then he must have Melie over to the show.

Carlos had soon got himself ready, and we were off for the hills.

For some miles we kept pretty much in cover as we moved toward the mountains. Carlos knew the way through the forest, where we ofttimes slipped on the moist roots of the great trees, and scrambled amongst the lianas that were everywhere. Two hours had gone when we had our first rest in a clump of cabbage palms.

Towering above us, on a mountain, stood an old abandoned fortress. Carlos said its walls were a hundred feet high and with a thickness of twenty feet. Our way lay to the eastward of that old stronghold.

Our progress now had us puffing, for it was up-up-up. We kept as much as possible in the glades. Pigeons were plentiful, and we spied a predatory hawk, at which Robert and I got our little rifles out of their cases. But Carlos put up his hand in caution.

"To shoot is not safe," said he. "Sound go ver' far, an' we do not want anyone know some ones is here."

And then we gave Carlos another turn of surprise. To see a bird fall, and no sound of the gun, – that was beyond reason. He snapped his finger at his ear to make sure he had not lost his hearing.

We showed him the silencers set on the rifles and tried to explain them, but he shook his head; his physics wasn't up to such juggling with sound.

The shadows were over everything when we stopped beside a brook to rest and make a meal. Carlos found wood that burned with little smoke, and we soon had a bird apiece, broiling. Out of a bag Carlos poured farine. With water he made a paste. Then came macadam – codfish stewed with rice. We topped off with bananas, and water from the stream.

The scene was like to have been the last to my eyes on this earth. A high peak towered some seven miles to the east. We could see the blue sea below, many miles to the north, with the golden-yellow horizon. Great tracts of forest were everywhere between, with bits of glades, and palm groves.

While we looked, the coast line darkened, the valleys blackened; the gloom crept up the slopes; swiftly it enveloped the three of us. Then for several minutes the mountain peaks glowed at the tops as if afire, and then they, too, went out, and it was night. The world was changed. The trees seemed like personalities now, come awake like the owls, with the going out of the light. Tree-ferns below us seemed to whisper with their greater neighbors – mysterious gossip. Night birds piped their solemn dirge, insects tweeked; tree toads shrilled in competition with the bellowing bull-frogs; owls hoarsely laughed, and called their "what-what-what."

A strange oppression crept over me and I yearned for the deck of the *Pearl*.

Suddenly Carlos sat erect – listening. I cocked my ear, but there was nothing but the usual night sounds. A minute passed. Then, ever so faintly I discerned the peculiar low rumble. It was something I had heard before. It rose and fell in waves of sound; and wave upon wave it swelled in volume.

"It's the voodoo drum!" I whispered Robert.

"That's over a mile away," he observed, listening.

"Seex mile! – maybe seven mile!" corrected Carlos.

We collected our belongings and were off in the direction of the sound. When we entered the forest, we no longer heard the sound. But after stumbling among the slimy roots, and bumping our noses on the swinging lianas, for half an hour, we came again out in the open, and again we heard

the drumming. Carlos ofttimes avoided the jungles by detours. At the end of an hour the rolling of the drum seemed only a few hundred yards away.

"T'ree more mile, I guess," said Carlos.

On and on we stumbled in the dark. The moon was not due till near morning, and so distinct was the drumming that we did not seem any longer to be approaching the place, but were already arrived.

Then at last the sound seemed more distant.

"Now we ver' close," said Carlos.

Something or other was contradictory.

A quarter of a mile or so through the dense forest, and a bright light showed in front.

Now cautiously we moved forward till we came to the edge of an open space. The place appeared to have been partly cleared by hand, for many tree-stumps presented.

We climbed into the low branches of a great tree. The great fire blazed but a hundred yards from our perch. The drummer sat astride his instrument (a cylinder of wood) the fingers of both hands playing on the skin stretched over the one end. The dancers were very many. Here was a repetition of the things I saw in the company of Jules Sevier.

To the right of the fire there was the raised platform, on which stood the snake-box. Back of all was some form of shelter, out from which in time came a figure cloaked in red, and wearing a red kerchief wound about the head. This was the *papaloi* (voodoo king). This appearance was the signal for a hush, and a halting of the dance. All grouped round. There were the usual requests for favors and the listening at the box for the answers.

Then came the slaughter of the fowls; and the mixing of the rum.

I had begun to breath more freely on my perch. But then Robert touched me on the arm.

"What's that thing on the ground?" he whispered.

I strained my eyes. The figures of the blacks obscured the view. But at last – what I saw froze my blood.

"We must save it," I said. "It's little Marie Cambon."

As I look back on the experience of the hours following, it is as if I were recalling a horrid dream.

"Robert," I whispered, "the rifles!"

We slipped to the ground, seized our little guns, and got back to our places.

The red-robed *papaloi* was fumbling with a rope that hung from a liana. An attendant was kneeling on the ground holding a cup to the lips of the child.

In another moment the child was swinging in the air by the rope, its head just clearing the ground. I heard it whimper in fright. The *papaloi* took up a knife.

"Give it to him in the hand," I said in Robert's ear.

We leveled our guns together. There was no sound of the explosions. The *papaloi* dropped the knife, seized his right hand with his left, and he bent over in pain. I had given my shot to the rope. After my second squeeze of the trigger it hung by a strand; a third lead missile, and the child went gently to the ground.

The voodoo worshipers began to scatter in panic of this strange visitation.

We in the tree slipped to the ground. I thrust my rifle into the hands of Carlos and, intent on making the most of the panic, rushed forward. The *papaloi* saw me coming, and called on the nearest of his followers. But I had up the child before any could interfere, and I sprinted back and thrust it into the arms of Robert.

"Run! both of you!" I cried. And I sought to delay pursuit, hurling piece after piece of dead-wood at the nearest blacks, who were already at the chase, urged on by the wounded *papaloi*.

I meant to run for it, and elude the voodoos in the thick forest, so soon as the laden Robert and Carlos should have a good start. My missiles danced about the shins of the foremost blacks, and they held up.

I was backing toward the edge of the jungle, and in the way of readily making my escape; but some wily black with a club must have taken a thought worth two of that, and got on the wrong side of me. I was just in the thought it was about time to make my break, when I got a crack on the back of my head that put me to sleep.

CHAPTER VII
A DISTRESS CALL GOES TO THE PEARL

I do not know how long I was unconscious, but when I opened my eyes I could see the bright stars, and I made out two black heads of negroes, who bore me in some kind of a litter to which I was bound, wrists and ankles.

I could hear the voices of others ahead, so I knew that there were more in the party. My head felt big, and a dizziness, and a sore spot, reminded me of the whack I'd got. We soon came to a stand, and there sounded a call. A turn of my litter gave me a view of a structure towering near by. Something in the contour was familiar. It was the great palace we were now come to.

I have to make mention of a matter of importance. It was not little Marie Cambon we had saved from the voodoos. This I saw when I grabbed the little one from the ground. It was a young mulatto. So little Marie, then, must still be immured in this old ruin. Perhaps, after all, I should find a way to save her and myself. Some unreasoning blind faith seemed to hold me up, in spite of my desperate situation.

My litter was soon in motion again, and we passed through some kind of portal. A lantern illumined the way, and we went up a broad stairway. In the dim light I made out richly carved pillars; mahogany shone red in the wood work, if I were not dreaming, and marble figures looked down on me.

Again we came to a stand, this time in a great hall, and my litter was let down to the floor. One came out and stood over me. It was the voodoo great-priest – the *papaloi*– as I could see by the red bandanna he still wore on his head, and his hand bound in a blood-stained rag. I noted this black's features were as regular as a white man's; and now there was a sneering smile on them.

"So you think you very wise and can defy the Great Power," he said. He turned and spoke something to an attendant, who stooped and tore open my shirt, while another held the lantern. It was to lay bare my skin where it was unstained and still white.

"Humph!" grunted the *papaloi*, "so I thought. It is one of the white boys."

"You came from Jamaica, in the schooner," he addressed me. "You make plenty good blood for the drink – and plenty good meat for the feast." This last with a malicious grin.

I could perceive that here was one, this voodoo priest, who was in the confidence of Duran. It was doubtless to him Duran delivered the children procured for sacrifice. And so here must be the source of the vast wealth of that white fiend of tinged blood. Something spurred me to defiant speech.

"You can tell Duran, alias Mordaunt," I began, "that I have had my fortune read, and that I would not exchange my fate for his at any price."

He stared for a moment speechless. Then he said something to the two litter bearers, who loosed the ropes that held me to the litter; then they stood me on my feet, and one holding either arm, led me through a doorway, the *papaloi* following, attended by another black with the lantern. It was many steps we went down the bare passage; a turn, and we stood before a door. A heavy bolt was drawn, and the door opened.

"Very soon you die," spoke the *papaloi*, as I was thrust in.

I heard the bolt slide into place with a click, and I stood in darkness. I felt in my pocket for my flash lamp. It was gone. I put my feet forward cautiously, step by step, my hand on the wall; and moved around my dungeon till I came to the door again. I became used to the dark, got my bearings, and paced the damp floor, side to side and end to end. It was four paces one way, eight the other. As I moved about, suddenly I caught in my eye a few stars peeking in on me. There was a slit in the wall high up. By reason of the thickness of the wall the view out was had only when standing directly in line with that narrow porthole.

The cell was barren, there was not even a box for a seat. A half hour was hardly gone, when I heard the click of the bolt again. This time it was food that was pushed in, on a wooden tray. Recalling those stories of the poisoned food given by the voodoos to their victims, I denied myself, even of the drink. In that hot, airless hole, what would I have not given for a draught of pure water!

I got the food off the tray and used it to sit on.

When I thrust the little one into Robert's arms, he and Carlos had run for it, as I directed. They got far enough into the jungle for safe hiding, and then Carlos went back to lead me there. I had already got that whack on the head, and the thing Carlos saw was the crew of blacks securing their prisoner.

It was then Robert decided to call our friends from the *Pearl*. So the two, carrying the little rescued mulatto, turn about, hurried back toward home. When they came to the place where we had cooked our meal, Robert made his signal fire. He made it big, for it was fifteen miles to the *Pearl's* anchorage. The two plaited a big screen of leaves and grasses. Again and again he spelled out in flashes the following:

Come ask for Brill.

To make out any answering signal at so great a distance, was a thing not to be expected, where a mere lantern was to be used. But he knew they would be on the lookout, and could not miss so great a flare.

Daylight had come before the two arrived at the Brill hut. Melie took the little one in charge; and it may here be said that the yellow tot was finally restored to the rejoicing parents.

RAY'S NARRATIVE

When Wayne and Robert had got out of sight, as they started on the trail of that Duran fellow, right away Grant Norris began to fuss.

"I don't think those boys ought to be allowed to go after those cannibals alone," he said. "Suppose those black cusses get wind of them and put up a fight. And they haven't anything but those dinky little rifles!"

"Meaning," I told him, "that they ought to have an old campaigner to protect them, and that old campaigner's name is Grant Norris."

"Oh, go 'long! you red-headed wag, you," he shot back at me.

"'Fess up now," I said. "You're just itching for excitement. But never fear, Wayne will send for you before the fighting begins – he knows you. In the meantime, you know Wayne and Robert well enough; there won't anyone get much the best of them."

When we had rowed back to the *Pearl*, things were got ready for a move to a new anchorage – nearer to the place where we had landed Wayne and Robert. Captain Marat said we must avoid having the lights of the town between us and any signal from Wayne.

Grant Norris was watching the hills back inland while the sun was still holding its fire on the tops of the mountains.

"Say," I asked him, "you don't expect to see fire signals in broad daylight, do you?"

"Daylight!" he sniffed – "It'll be night before you can turn round twice."

And sure enough, while we were talking the sun was off the peaks, and the lower hills were black enough to show a fire.

I hadn't any more than got ready the big lantern with the strong reflector, than Wayne's signal began to flash, eight or ten miles back in the hills. I answered. And then came the message: "Good so far."

"I guess they find out sometheeng," said Captain Marat.

"It's good to know they're already making progress," observed Julian.

"Next," said Norris, "they'll be signalling – 'Come on, the trail is hot.'" And he stayed on deck till long after midnight.

The next day dragged for all of us, waiting for night. Nothing was right. Even Rufe's noon meal was no success.

"Say, you-all is jest de cantankerest bunch!" said Rufe. "Dem 'are biscuits is jest de kin' you-all been a braggin' on; an' dat fish, an' de puddin' – W'at's wrong wid dem, ah likes to know?"

But no one had a word on that.

And when the supper went the same way, Rufe put his foot down, said he wouldn't cook another meal till we got the voodoo out of our systems.

"Dat w'at it is, hit's de voodoo w'at's got into you-all's stummicks," he declared. "Dey ain't no use o' my cookin' no more till you is busted wid it."

That hot lazy sun finally dipped down west, and from then on, every candle or firefly on shore had us on the jump. Grant Norris was the worst of the bunch. At ten o'clock he broke loose.

"Those young skunks!" he said. "Won't I give them a piece of my mind! They might give us a word. No sense in keeping mum like this."

At midnight all but Norris gave it up and turned in. He said he wouldn't trust the watch, and anyway there wasn't any sleep in him.

I hadn't any more than got two winks of my first beauty sleep, than something had me by the scruff, and bounced me out of my bunk onto the floor. It was worse than the nightmare.

I was kneading the cobwebs of fairyland out of my eyes, and I heard Norris saying:

"Pile up on deck you sleepy-head! Wayne's talking to you."

I "piled up" on deck; and there, way back in the hills, ever so far away, I saw the flashing of a beacon light. A long flash, a short one, another long, a short. That's C. Three long ones – O. And so on. "Come ask for Brill. Come ask for Brill," the message went.

Norris brought the lamp with the strong reflector, and I flashed back an answer. But they evidently didn't see our smaller light, for they continued with their – "Come, ask for Brill. Come ask for Brill."

Now I can't explain just how, but I knew from the way the flashes were given that it wasn't Wayne, but Robert, who was doing the signalling. Then they were not together up there, for Wayne always did that job.

I told Norris the message, and he began to poke everybody else up. He went banging at Rufe, too, and there was considerable excitement all round.

"Oh, yes, sah, yes, sah, Mistah Norris," said Rufe "dat coffee 'll be a'bilin' in jes' a minute. Glory be to goodness! dis heah voodoo carryin's on is wus dan gittin' religion at a shoutin' Methodis' camp meetin'."

I watched the flashes up in the hills till finally they quit; but there was never a word but just those four: "Come, ask for Brill."

Our packs were already made up; it remained only for Rufe to put the finishing touches to the grub we were going to take. Captain Marat and Grant Norris had their high powered rifles, the hand ax was more than I needed, for my legs were nimble. Julian got out his handsome shot-gun, and a dozen shells Rufe had loaded with buck-shot.

"Jes' two of dem 'ar buck-shot shells in my ol' gun and dat's all I needs," Rufe said. "Dey ain't nobody guine to come nigh dis heah schooner 'less'n I says de word."

We pulled the small boat high on' the beach, near the place where we had parted with Wayne and Robert, and without preliminaries we started off by the road. It was fearfully dark, but the trail was the path of least resistance, so we couldn't get lost. Two hours after the start daylight busted through the trees. In another hour or so we butted into a village. And the first pickaninny we met told us the way to "Brills," on the upper side of the village.

A black man, and a black woman, and a black boy, were at the door of the Brill mansion.

"We're looking for two white boys," announced Norris.

"Dey ain't no white boys 'round heah," said that black boy. And say! that voice had a familiar twang to it.

"Say, Robert," I spit out, "your face goes all right, but you'll have to smear the black better on that voice of yours, if you want to fool this kid."

We were all inside now; and it didn't take Robert long to tell his story.

"And so you are sure they've got Wayne in that old ruin?" said Norris, addressing this black man, Carlos Brill.

"Yes, I think ver' sure," said the man. "I see they go that way with him."

"Well, Captain Marat," began Norris, "I say storm the place at once."

"Yes," assented Captain Marat, "we have to do something."

"But we'll have to go slow," Robert said. "That place must be lousy with those cannibals; and no one knows how many guns they'll have."

Well, Norris was willing to go slow, if he could only go soon. And we were not long getting started.

That black fellow, Carlos Brill, led the way, and that black fellow, Robert Murtry, with him. Julian and I were rear guard. And they gave me Wayne's rifle to carry.

It wasn't long till we got out of the woods into an open spot; and then they showed us what they'd figured out was Wayne's prison. It was way over on the other side of a ravine; and say! it was the queerest looking, half tumble-down old palace!

We went down into the ravine; and on the other side Carlos Brill took us out of the path – afraid of an ambush, or something – and we began to slip and stumble among the roots, and brush, and snaky-looking lianas that hung between the trees. Why the place wasn't full of monkeys I don't know. There wasn't any use of anyone telling us to go slow, this wasn't any fast track.

When we stopped, to let our breaths catch up with us, Carlos told us we hadn't much farther to go. But he wouldn't be able to get us nearer to the palace under shelter of the forest than about four hundred yards.

"Don't let that worry you any," said Norris. "Captain Marat or I, either one, won't ask anything better, if we can draw them out."

"Yes," agreed Captain Marat, "four honderd yard' do ver' well."

I'd seen them both shoot, and I agreed with that. And they had belts and pockets full of ammunition.

Well, we finally got to the place, with that big old half ruin on the opposite side of the clearing. Norris picked a tree, with big branches near the ground. Captain Marat took up a position seventy-five or a hundred yards to the left. Those two big-gun men and Carlos had decided on their plan of campaign, and the rest of us got behind a good screen and awaited developments.

Jean Marat banged away first, sending a ball through an opening in the second story of that old palace. All waited to see some attention paid to it over there. We calculated it ought to start some curiosity at least – that is, if there really was anybody about the shebang. I began to have my doubts; it looked dead as a tomb.

But we didn't have to wait more than about a minute. I saw a black scamp scamper across the open space with a gun in his hand, going from the woods we were in right for that palace. I pointed him out to Norris, who let fly at him with a bullet just as he disappeared round a bush.

Robert said it was most likely a sentry, stationed on that path.

Then Captain Marat's rifle went off again. Robert ran over, and brought back news that Marat had toppled over a black, who was running for the palace from that side.

The next shot fired came from the palace. I saw the smoke up at the second story. Norris banged away – said he saw a black head peep round a piece of stone wall. Two more shots came from the palace, they tore loose a twig or two over our heads.

Then Captain Marat shot twice. It was a minute before the palace artillery opened up again. They must have fired ten shots – they came faster than I could count them. Grant Norris was happy. He up with his rifle, and at his shot I heard a yell over at the palace. Jean Marat got another one, too, Robert came to tell me.

And now Robert got hold of me and dragged me along with him round about through the woods. It was some time before I could hold him up long enough to get it out of him what it was all about. He meant we two should have a little of the kind of sport Marat and Norris were revelling in. There was a patch of trees off to the right – south of the old palace; and it was there we finally won round to. We climbed high in a tree, and got us to where we had a fine view behind that broken wall the blacks were using for a breastworks. There wasn't less than a dozen of those voodoo cannibals there, in plain view of our perch, and we weren't three hundred yards from them.

"Now let's give it to them fast," said Robert, and he began to work the slide handle of his little rifle. I followed suit with Wayne's gun.

There wasn't a sound of our firing, of course, on account of the silencers. So the stings those fellows got on the flank began to puzzle them. There was one black who gave me a good target. I wasn't much of a shot, but after a few pulls on my trigger, I saw that fellow put his hand in a place, and in a way that convinced me that he would be sitting on a sore spot for a day or two anyway. Those blacks quit firing and got to discussing some question or other, and some of them slunk away.

And just about then I heard something familiar, back in the forest. It was the call of the *Whip-poor-will*; and I didn't need anyone to tell me what bird it came from; there was only one particular bird who could be whistling that call in broad daylight.

"There's Wayne!" said Robert. And he almost knocked me off my limb, with his hurry to get to the ground.

And then as we hurried over to the others, we answered Wayne's call; and in just a little, he was among us.

And here's where Wayne takes up the story again.

CHAPTER VIII
THE VOODOO STRONGHOLD

How long I had been dozing the last spell, I don't know, but when my eyes opened, daylight was showing through that little slit high up in the cell wall. It wasn't much light that came in, but it was enough to show me some kind of decorative affair on the otherwise plain walls of the dungeon.

I moved close to the thing; and I set the tray against the wall, below it, and got me up closer. Then I was able to make out it was a kind of shrine, built into the wall. There was a crucifix back in the niche, and kneeling figures at the foot.

Then suddenly I felt a queer sense of creeping in my flesh – a thought, like a revelation, had flashed in my mind. Here was just the sort of thing I had heard that taciturn black fellow, Amos, tell about; a dungeon, in the wall a shrine – Christ on the cross, and figures at the foot! Could this be the very cell and shrine Amos had told of? It seemed too good to be true. And yet there was eloquent argument. For wasn't there that mysterious interest of Amos in Mordaunt, alias Duran, at Kingston? And was it not reasonably certain that Amos had lost his life at the hands of this Duran? And now had we not traced Duran to this very place? Trembling with eagerness and suspense, I sought, and got my hand on, the figure of the Virgin. I shook it gently, ashamed to so manhandle a holy thing. It held fast. I put on greater and greater violence; and finally I felt it give a little. Compunction was all gone now; and at last I lifted out the figure, which was prolonged at the bottom to make a round peg.

My heart thumped with excitement. I pulled on the frame of the shrine. A few tugs and the whole thing swung in like a door, on hinges. And so there was uncovered a black hole behind.

I put my hands on the edge and tried to pull myself up into that hole. It was no go – I hadn't the strength. I tried again and again, but I weakened at every effort.

I went over and looked at that food and drink, tempted to have a few mouthfuls – for strength's sake. But I finally decided against the risk. Instead, I filled my lungs with air – such as there was – and rested.

After five minutes I got my toes on the tray again. And this time I made it. I got through. And I pulled the shrine door shut after me. There was an interstice through which I got my hand, and put that figure-peg in place again. I meant they should not discover the manner of my escape from the cell.

That place I was now in was entirely dark, and the air damp and oppressive. I could touch both walls at once, so narrow was the place.

And now which way to turn? How I wished for my flashlight! I tried it to the left, moving cautiously. I had taken about twenty short paces, when I noted little beams of light coming through the wall. I got my eye to a chink, and made it out that here was another shrine, set in the wall of some room of the palace.

I got a view, too, of some part of that room. A cluster of burning candles stood on a table, which piece of furniture, I could see, was of richly-carved mahogany. And there lay my flashlight in plain view.

A figure moved into the field of my eye. It was the *papaloi*; his wounded hand was still in a bandage. He bustled about, though I could make nothing of his occupation; till finally he set a pomade jar on the table, turned in his clothing at the neck, and began to smear his face. Here was a fastidious black. The process was long and leisurely, and there came a period of wait – to let the oil that shone on his dark skin soak in. And then he took up a cloth and began to wipe.

It was then I got a start, for his face came out from under the rag – white! And it was then I recognized Duran, alias Mordaunt! This voodoo *papaloi*, who put the knife to little innocents, was no other than Duran himself. I was now prepared to believe the stories of the horrifying cruelty, and strange fanaticism – or whatever it may be called – of some of those of mixed blood.

A black attendant came into the room with a vessel of water. Duran washed, while the black busied himself with laying out clothing, as I could see when he moved into my view. These Duran began to don, making himself into more the appearance of a gentleman, a role he had learned to assume. Only now he allowed his features to relax into an expression that was more that of a hardened criminal than of a gentleman. There was little talk, and that was in French; no word of it that I could understand.

I lingered in the hope that the room should be vacated, and I might try if his Calvary – through whose filigree chinks I peeked – should not prove to be another door, and so be the means of my recovering my electric flashlight. It was a thing I wanted, to help me find my way out of that black hole.

The black man went out, finally, soon followed by Duran. I heard the door close. Now was my time! I got my hand through a crevice. I tried one kneeling figure, and then another. It came out, and I swung the gate in. In another moment I was on the floor, though I turned over a chair in the jump. I closed the portal and looked about.

The furnishings were rich, the floors marble. A single window there was, tightly shuttered; a bed, with an end to the wall.

I thrust my flashlight into a pocket of my trousers; I still held the stone peg in my hand.

The candles had been left burning; likely Duran would be back; so it was time I was scrambling out. But my presence was already known, for the door opened, and in sprang a black.

There was no time for anything but defense. The black reached for me. I dodged, and made toward the bed. As I landed on the covers, he had me by the ankle. And then I came down on his woolly pate with my stone peg, using all my force.

The black doubled up on the floor without a sound. I rushed a chair under the secret portal, and in two moments was back in the dark passage, the door with its peg back in place.

I put my eyes to the chink. In a minute Duran appeared. That he was all in a knot – dumfounded at the thing he saw, was plain.

I was curious to know whether I had committed manslaughter, but when Duran opened the door and began to call out to others, I thought it wise to move. I used my light, and went back the way I had come. There showed nothing but bare stone walls; the passage, between four and five feet wide, and not twice so high.

Presently it descended, in steps; at the bottom my light showed a door. I lifted a long, rusty latch, and with repeated strong pulls, swung it open. There was a hole through, ostensibly to permit of reaching the latch with a stick from the outside.

The welcome outdoor air came through a heavy growth of vines. It was perhaps fifteen feet to the ground. I swung the door to after me, and scrambled down by the vines.

Ah, how good that bit of turf felt under my feet! Trees were all about, though just here they were new growth – small. A stream trickled over stones close by. I went down to its edge and drank my fill, and I took the brook for my guide, upward, toward the hills.

I came to a place where I must walk in the water to go round a low cliff. And then I came upon a path, new used, and seeming to come from that great building whose upper walls I could still see peeping through the tree-tops.

I heard voices, and jumped behind a bushy screen. There appeared on the path a half dozen black men, and an old black crone. Two pairs of the men were burdened with litters, and two went before as an advance guard – they were armed with guns. On the litter were bundles, some in gunny sacks, and some tied in blankets. I was sure I saw some movement in the bundle on one litter, as of some living thing there. My heart thumped with the thought that here were some little ones being transported for voodoo slaughter. And my reason told me that little Marie Cambon was of the number.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.