

Lentala of the South Seas

The Romantic Tale of a Lost Colony

By W. C. Morrow

CHAPTER I. *On Unknown Shores. Pursued by Our Dying Ship. Cast Away Among Dangers. A Pointing Finger and a Sword. Beguiled by Savage Royalty. A Strange Girl and a Prediction.*

In range of my outlook seaward as I lay on the yellow strand was a grotesque figure standing near and gazing inland. His powerful frame was broad and squat; his long arms, ending with immense hands, hung loosely at his sides; his hair was ragged; and out of his blank face blinked small blue eyes wide apart. So accustomed was I to his habitually placid expression that the keenness with which he was looking roused me fully out of the lethargy into which extreme exhaustion had plunged me.

“Well, Christopher!” I said with an attempt at cheerfulness.

The strange look in my serving-man’s eyes did not disappear when he turned them on me at my greeting, but my glance at the forest discovered nothing alarming. It was useless to question Christopher; he would take his time.

I rose with stiffened members. The wretched, beaten colonists were prone along the beach, all sleeping except Captain Mason and Mr. Vancouver. With silent Christopher shambling at my heels I passed Mr. Vancouver as he sat on the sand beside his slumbering daughter; he was watching the sea more with his blue lips than his leaden eyes. I gave him a cheery greeting, since it was no time to harbor old scores. The effort failed; he only blinked at me. Already I had suspected that his quarrel with me because Christopher had stowed away on the vessel was merely the seizing of an opportunity to rupture the strong friendship between Annabel and me.

Even at a distance I had seen that Captain Mason’s spirit was hunting the waters, as he stood apart in a splendid solitude, arms folded, and towering in the dignity of a gladiator who might be disarmed, but not conquered. Never had I seen a profounder pathos than his when, finding the *Hope* foundering and helpless, he had ordered her abandonment and sent us into the boats. Then had come the most haunting thing that ever a sailor experienced.

It was the pursuit of us by the dying barkentine. What sails the last storm had left played crazy pranks with the derelict. With no hand on her wheel the rudder swung free. We were rowing northwestwardly, with the wind, and thus it was that the *Hope*, thrust by wind and wave, followed us, with wide swerves, with lungings and lurchings, now and then making a graceful sweep up a swell and then a wallowing roll to the trough. The fore-and-aft sails were gone, but some of the square canvas held; and the sheets flapped with a dismal foolishness between accidental fills. It was the drunken plunging of the hulk in deliberate pursuit of us that appalled. She snouted the water swinishly; she reeled and groveled under the seas that boarded her. Through it all, whether she was coming prow first, beam on, or stern foremost, and no matter how far she would veer, she clung to our course, shadowing us, hounding us, as though imploring our help.

In all the fury of the storms, from their first assaults at Cape Horn to their beating us down in the South Seas, Captain Mason had not faltered; he fought desperate odds with the cunning and valor of Hercules. But this careering mad thing, stripped of the grace and dignity of a sane ship,—this staggering, sodden monster, mortally stricken and dumbly floundering after the

master who had abandoned her that she might go down alone into the deep,—was more than the man could bear; and he had sat staring in the boat, Christopher and I rowing, while we dodged the barkentine's blind assaults. We were still bending to the work when darkness fell. It was then that the wind died, and we saw her no more.

Captain Mason showed relief at being dragged back into the living world by our approach.

"No sign of her?" I asked.

"Not from here. The view is shut in by those promontories," indicating two headlands embracing our beach.

"Then," said I, "Christopher will scale one of them and I the other."

There was a faint twinkle behind the seaman's look, and something else, which recalled what I had seen in Christopher's face as he gazed at the forest.

"I imagine you haven't slept much," I said, knowing his anxiety on the barkentine's account.

"How could I, Mr. Tudor, when she had been following me like that?"

"Then you have already been up there to see if you could find her?" I ventured.

He looked amused as he drawled, "Not all the Way," and gave Christopher a look that appeared to be understood. His gesture swept the heights on either side and the richly verdured mountains that began to spring in terraces a short distance from the beach. "This is a tropical region," he went on, "and those trees bear lively fruit. It is brown and carries swords. I didn't get all the way to the headland."

I understood, and inquired, "Did they speak?"

"No. A pointing finger with a sword behind it needs no words."

I wondered where we could be, that armed natives should exhibit a hostile attitude. "Where are we stranded?" I asked.

"I don't know. It has been weeks since I could even take a dead reckoning, and we've been blown far since then. My instruments disappeared while I was exploring this morning."

"And we are without food or weapons," I added, feeling a thrill at the prospect of measuring forces with an obscure menace.

Mr. Vancouver had loaded the barkentine with every possible means of defense, subsistence, and development, but we had fallen on an island far short of the one in the Philippines which he intended to colonize. The fate of the Hope was a vital matter. Most of her precious cargo was behind bulkheads. If she had not gone down, very likely she would drift to this island and yield her resources to any enemies we might encounter here.

Christopher was gazing at the forest again. I could see only deep shadows and brown tree-boles under the leafage. Birds of brilliant plumage were flitting among the trees, and the warmth of the sun bathed us in sweet, heavy odors.

"They are coming, sir," said Christopher.

I observed a slow undulation in a wide arc among the shadows. A tree-trunk in the outer edge apparently detached itself, then advanced into the open, baited, and raised a sword. Five hundred other shapes came forth from the wide semi-circle touching the shore at either end. Some bore swords, others spears, and still others knotted war-clubs. The soldiers were brown and bareheaded, and the dress of each was limited to the loins, except that of the leader, the man who had first stepped out; he wore a sort of tunic or light cloak, and a head-dress, both gaudily illuminated with feathers.

Captain Mason stood motionless.

"What shall we do?" I impatiently cried.

Christopher left us and rapidly roused the sleepers. He must have dropped reassuring words, for the stir proceeded without panic, though all could see the advancing threat, which approached with an ominous deliberation.

“Do you think it’s to be a slaughter, Captain?” I asked.

He gave no answer, being evidently stunned. I turned to Christopher as he rejoined us. Many a time since I had rescued him from a mob of boys in a Boston street, taken him to my lodgings, and made him my servant, his strange mind had seemed able to penetrate baffling obscurities. At such times he had a way of listening, as though to voices which he alone could hear; but with that was an extraordinary reticence of tongue, and often an indirection that had tried my patience until I learned to understand him as well as an ordinary mortal could.

“Are they going to kill us, Christopher?” I asked.

He was in a deep abstraction, and I knew he was listening. “Sir?”

That was his usual way of gaining time, and I had learned to wait.

“Are they going to kill us?”

“Kill us, sir?”

“You are asking me, sir?”

“Yes. Are they going to kill us?”

“Not now, sir,” he firmly answered.

The glance which Captain Mason and I exchanged was one accepting Christopher’s opinion and groping for what lay beyond it.

With some accuracy of maneuvering, the leader aligned his soldiers, stepped out after halting them fifty yards away, and stood waiting, obviously for a parley. He was showing impatience as Captain Mason still stood motionless.

“Some one must meet him,” I said. “It will never do to show timidity. You are the fittest.”

“These people are strange to me,” he replied, “and I don’t know how to proceed. They have an appearance of ferocity that I have never seen in these seas. Many outside men must have drifted to this island, but I’ll warrant that none ever left it, for I’ve never heard of anything that looks just like this. I imagine it is the graveyard of the unreported wrecks that happen in this part of the Pacific.”

I was surprised at the grayness in his face and the glaze in his eyes. What could our two hundred and fifty men, women, and children, helpless as they were, do without his shrewdness and courage?

“Then we have all the more to do,” I urged.

He squared himself and said: “We three will meet them. Put yourself forward. Your height and strength will impress them.”

It looked odd that he did not include Mr. Vancouver, the leader of our enterprise, and Lee Rawley, the aristocratic and disdainful young lawyer whom Mr. Vancouver hoped that Annabel would marry.

Meanwhile, the leader of the savages, a man of commanding size and manner, had been growing more impatient, and was putting his men through some manual that hinted at barbarous proceeding; but when we started he desisted, and met us with urbane gestures. Then ensued a struggle to find a means of communication. Both Captain Mason and I knew something of the Pacific languages, he from a sailor’s experience and I from having fought as a first lieutenant in the Philippines during the war with Spain; but apparently our combined resources failed. Finally we caught a Spanish word and then a German. It remained for Christopher to discover that the ambassador spoke some pidgin-English with his tongue and all languages with his gestures. Thus

we learned that the gracious King Rangan had sent Gato, commander-in-chief of the army, with an escort of honor to conduct us to the imperial presence.

Captain Mason and I carefully avoided each other's eyes. The tomb-like mask that Christopher knew how to wear was on his face.

As there were two armed savages to each colonist throat, there was nothing to do but accept. In a dismal procession guarded by the soldiers, we labored through the sand and sank into the scented forest.

After a walk through fragrant aisles of shade and color, we came upon a wide sweep where the undergrowth had been cleared away; in its place was a cluster of huts made of bamboo and thatch. The central space was occupied by one more imposing than the others. The matting curtain at the door was drawn aside after we had been seated before it on the ground, and a sturdy figure, followed by a striking retinue, came forth and took an elevated seat on a platform extending from the house.

The king's gorgeous robe of a light fabric adorned with feathers and embroidered with gold was worn with a knowledge of its impressiveness. A wide band of gold embedded with gems served for a crown; the blazing scepter and massive wristlets and anklets were of like materials; the ears and fingers flashed with jewels. The royal face was benignant. Gato stepped forth to interpret, as the king's immediate followers, dressed in long embroidered garments of native texture, ranged about the throne.

The attendant swinging a large feather fan over the king's head was the only woman discoverable. There was a striking difference between her and the men. It was manifest in a prouder poise of the head, in a look of higher intelligence, and in a finer definition of features. The eagerness with which her glance ran over us, a shyness that struggled with an impulse to a bolder scrutiny, combined with a certain refinement of bearing to set her apart. She was raimented with no less barbaric splendor than the king and his immediate attendants, but in better taste. Her brown bare arms and neck were turned on the graceful lines of youth, and her wrists and hands were small. Her hair, instead of having the glistening blackness of the men's, housed some of the sun's gold; and I was startled to discover finally that her eyes were a deep blue.

At last her roving glance was caught and held by me. In her eyes was a moment of hungry inquiry. She caught her breath; a break came in the regular swing of the fan, and her eyelids drooped.

My fascinated attention to her was diverted by a deep rumble. King Rangan was speaking.

CHAPTER II. *The Falling of a Long Night*. A Royal Feast. The Fan-Bearer's Significant Conduct. A Gloomy Forecast. Had Any Before Us Escaped? The King's Promise. Prisoned in Paradise.

Interpreter made a genuflection to the throne, and beckoned to Captain Mason and me. I thought that Mr. Vancouver ought to be included, but the skipper ignored my inquiring glance, and stepped forward. After bowing, we stood waiting.

The king gave us a shrewd look. Then his eyes blazed, and he ripped out something to the interpreter. I discovered the cause. My faithful Christopher had brought up his prodigious strength for a possible emergency, and it was clear that the king was offended by the grotesque figure.

The interpreter hesitated, for he knew Christopher's speech-value, and the king snapped out another command. I knew it was an order that some shame be put upon Christopher. At that my

muscles hardened, and I stepped protectingly before him. The fan over the king's head abruptly stopped. The leader raised his hand, and a dozen of his men advanced.

Dimly aware that Captain Mason was employing some pacific measures, I was more concerned by Annabel's surprising act. Her eyes shining and her cheeks aglow, she briskly came up, laid her hand on Christopher's arm, and sweetly said:

"Come and stay back here with us."

His pathetic look went questioningly from her to me, and he held his ground. I glanced round to see what next the king would do. With astonishment or wonder the fan-bearer was staring at Annabel, who made a striking picture; then she whispered into the royal ear. In a milder voice he said something to the interpreter, who by a gesture to us indicated that the king was satisfied. At a word from me, Christopher came and stood beside me.

His ostensible purpose proved to be merely a formal welcome, an ascertainment of our origin, purpose, and disaster, and an invitation to a feast.

As the others of the colony were in too dull a state to give attention, the king confined to us three a shrewd scrutiny. But Captain Mason and I, feeling that the welcome was only a sheathed sword, held blank faces, and did not even pass a glance of understanding; and Christopher could be depended on under all circumstances to give no betraying sign. The one thing to do was to show a grateful acquiescence. The time for planning would come when our people were capable of thought and action,—if we should be spared that long.

It was indeed a feast. The smoke which Christopher had seen rose from a barbecue, at which fresh meat and fowls and fish had been deliciously cooked. The completeness of the preparations indicated that they must have been begun immediately after our landing. Fragrant boughs were spread on the ground near the barbecue trench, and on them we seated ourselves. Plantain leaves made excellent platters. Roasted yams, bread made of ground seed or grain, and fruits of many kinds, were served in abundance.

The effect was magical; the down-hearted took cheer, and laughter ran through the trees. Much of the transformation was wrought by the solicitous attentions of the servers; but more cheering was the gracious friendliness of the king, who, besides personally directing the service, mingled with us in a democratic way, yet with no sacrifice of dignity.

Most fascinating to me was the fan-bearer. Whereas the warriors stood in awe of his Majesty, she treated him with almost a flippant disregard. She went among the colonists, keenly anxious that all should be pleased, her face breaking into bewitching smiles, her mischievous eyes dancing, her musical laugh rippling. The distinction in her manner as she had stood behind the throne was augmented in the modest abandon of her rôle of hostess. The alertness of her glance, the joyous spirits that bubbled out of her light pose and movement, her sprite-like airiness, her obvious efforts to restrain an instinct to play, to tease, to get into mischief, a running over of kindness and happiness,—these and more elusive qualities set her apart from the men and made them look dull and sordid.

Her greatest interest was in Annabel, the only highly cultured woman in our party, since the colony was composed of workers in practical industries. The two girls had no language in common, and appeared sharply different in temperament and training; yet there was visible between them a bond of feminine sympathy such as no man can understand. It was curious that the savage one was not abashed before her highly civilized sister. In the gentle eagerness with which she served Annabel, frankly studied her, and courted her notice, was something that looked pathetically like the yearning of a starved soul for what Annabel had—the enjoyment of a

birthright. Annabel appeared to see that longing, and she stretched forth a friendly hand into the fan-bearer's darkness.

Captain Mason, Christopher, and I formed a group. Despite the grief and anxiety on the sailor's face, he betrayed his share of the sunshine that the girl bestowed on all. She came to us often, and there was a touch of shyness not visible when she flitted among the others. Virtually ignoring me, she gave some attention to the captain, and was particularly solicitous toward Christopher. She stuffed him, and laughed at him. Christopher enjoyed it, gazed up into her sparkling eyes, and strained his ribs with the food that she coaxingly urged upon him.

On one of her visits I smilingly handed her a little pocket toilet-case which I carried. She took it gingerly, examined it curiously, and with childish interest inspected its contents. Her surprise at discovering the mirror was not so great as I had expected, and did not look quite sincere. She held it up, made a grimace at her reflection, thrust out at it a tongue as sweet and pink as a baby's, tossed the kit back at me, and went dancing off in a swirl of laughter.

Presently she demurely returned on a pretense of looking after Christopher's wants, and of a sudden, brilliantly smiling, held out her hand for the trinket. I gave it to her. Her eyes fell when I looked up closely into them, and in agitation she thrust the case into her bosom. I discovered that Annabel was curiously observing her.

Captain Mason gazed thoughtfully after her as she left, and remarked:

"That girl is going to be mixed up with our fate."

"What do you make of her?"

"An eaglet hatched by buzzards."

Christopher's evident regard for her was dazzled wonder.

"You like her, Christopher?" I asked.

He was serious at all times, and much of his gravity was sadness. He nodded impressively.

"Yes, sir."

"She has fed you well."

"Yes, sir." He spread his immense hands over his stomach.

"I'll ask her to bring you some more," I said.

His face showed alarm. "Don't, sir! I'd shorely bust."

"But you wouldn't have to eat more, even if she brought it."

"Yes, I would, sir."

"Why?"

"I'd jess *have* to, sir." This with a solemn helplessness.

"He has taken her measure," dryly remarked Captain Mason.

He had found opportunity to study the splendid jewels so abundantly adorning the king and the girl.

"Those gems," he said, "were cut by European lapidaries."

There was a disturbing suggestion in his words, but I could not define it. This island had received rich treasures from civilization. Here was a mystery.

"How do you account for them?" I asked.

"The typhoon makes many wrecks. There's no knowing what shores they crawl up on to die."

"Yes; but you see that although our ship was wrecked, we came ashore. Survivors of other wrecks likely have had the same experience."

"No doubt."

"Then, why haven't they given out news of this island? It is evidently very rich, and—"

He gave me an obscure look, and turned away with the remark:

“I think you’ll find the reason in a few hours.”

He must have felt the hurt in my silence, and opened a confidence on another tack.

“You have noticed, Mr. Tudor, that there are no women, children, nor domestic animals in this village. Do you infer anything from that?”

“What is your inference, Captain?”

“The village is not inhabited. The natives live back of those mountains to the west. This is merely a receiving-station for wrecks and castaways.”

The shrewdness of the king was not hidden by his hospitality. I did not overlook the inquiries that he made among the colonists with Gato’s help, nor his private colloquy with Mr. Vancouver, nor the thoughtful look of that gentleman when it was over.

The banquet was ended; the colony was reassembled before the throne; the king, backed by his now sedate fan-wielder, seated himself; and Captain Mason, Christopher, and I stood ready. We were made to understand the following:

We had not been invited to this island, but the misfortune that landed us on it would be respected. Two circumstances ruled the situation. One was that no vessels from the outside world ever put in here, and hence our means of escape were restricted to such resources as the king might devise; the other, that our intercourse with the people would not be permitted beyond a certain limit. The king explained that in youth he had gone abroad and found that the ways of white people were not suited to the islanders, who would be demoralized should they come under our civilization.

At intervals he sent his people, two or three at a time, in a small boat to the nearest islands, some hundreds of miles away, with native products for barter. But so great had been their precautions that the situation of the island had never been discovered. In these boats one or two of us would be taken away at a time, and thus placed in the path of ships that would assist us homeward.

In order to keep us isolated from the people, we were to be conducted at once to a pleasant valley, which would be free to us for our exclusive use. Natives skilled in farming would be furnished us for a time as instructors; but it would be expected that we should pledge our honor not to make any attempt to leave the valley without permission.

Every heart among us sank. A deep look was in Captain Mason’s eyes. It was on the end of my tongue to say, “Captain, let him know that we can make our own vessels and leave in them;” but a glance at him informed me that he had forgotten nothing, and that anything but a cheerful acceptance of the old bandit’s conditions, until we might devise and execute plans of our own, would precipitate immediate disaster. And then I understood why the captain had asked no question about the barkentine.

He said to me, under his breath:

“You have an easy tongue. We must keep our people blind for the present. Brace them up and flatter the king.”

The colonists were in the apathy of weariness and repletion. The glow with which I put the situation to them was barely needed to secure their acquiescence.

I turned to the king. Only with difficulty could I see him clearly through the intensely dramatic picture made by the girl. All through the conference I had seen her intense anxiety. What did it mean? With her sweet audacity, she might have made some sign. As I read her conduct, it betrayed a terrible uneasiness lest we refuse or were ungracious. Clearly she was greatly relieved by our acceptance.

I thanked the king and gratefully accepted his proffers. He then informed us that we should immediately be conducted to our valley, made comfortable, and supplied with everything needful.

The cavalcade, conducted by the armed guard, started through the enchanted forest, and mysteries throbbed in the very air. Never had I seen so pathetic a spectacle as this dragging procession of civilized people marched as dumb cattle to the shambles by a horde of savages.

Captain Mason, Christopher, and I stood apart as the others filed past. The man of the sea was in a deep reverie.

"If the king," I said, "has been so careful to conceal this island from the world, why should he plan sending us away to betray it?"

Captain Mason gave me a slow look.

"Do you think that he intends to send us away?" he asked.

"If not, he hasn't sent other castaways off, and we'll find them here."

Again that slow look, but I felt that it saw too far to include me. He shook his head, and said, as though talking to himself:

"Now begins the great struggle. We'll be patient—and ready. That girl is our hope."

The king descended; the fan-bearer, her face mantled with content, disappeared within the administration hut and dropped the curtain. The rear guard were waiting for us three, and we started. After a few paces, I turned, and saw, as I had hoped to see, a brown face watching us through the parted curtain, and it was filled with more mysteries than any enchanted forest ever held.

On and up we went, and finally reached the summit. We stood on a small open plateau, which abruptly ended in a precipice. Before us was a giant chasm in a great tableland of lava. The floor was a thousand feet below. We were looking down on it from the top of the great wall of columnar basalt which enclosed it. The chasm was an irregular ellipse, some three miles on its minor axis and five on its major. The floor was level, and, except for some farms, was covered with a forest. A breeze sent long, unctuous waves of lighter green rolling over it, or swirling in graceful spirals where the wall deflected the wind and drifted it on in majestic eddies.

In splendid contrast to the deep, warm colors below was the gloomy black of the mighty enclosing rampart. Near the upper end a beautiful stream, nearly a river in size, made a wild, joyous leap over the brink. A lake into which the water plunged sent up clouds of mist, out of which sprang a rainbow. From the lake ran the stream of molten silver which swung lazily on its shining way through the valley till lost in the distance. The leader of the guard announced that the valley was our destination. I was dumb in the grasp of its witchery, but a quiet voice brought me back:

"As good a prison as another." Captain Mason had spoken.

"Why, man," I cried, "that is Paradise!"

"No doubt; but the flaming sword will keep us in, not out."

During the march I had not failed to keep Christopher in the corner of my eye. I had been trying to read in his face one of those flashes of insight which his fine instinct sometimes threw into dark places. He had held his listening attitude often since I found him standing beside me on the sand. It had given his face a certain leaden alertness, which, as we beheld the valley, slowly faded into the habitual blankness, and I saw that it was useless to question him.

We descended through a steep, narrow cleft, and were marched through a forest to the stream. A rude bridge bore us across, and there we found a large number of natives rapidly and skilfully building us a village of huts made from logs, boughs, and thatch. From all indications, they must

have begun the work almost immediately after we landed. Large stores of food and other necessities had been accumulated; nothing needed for our comfort and sustenance had been neglected.

As soon as the soldiers had helped us bring order to the camp and the building of the village was finished, they and the workmen melted away in the twilight.

CHAPTER III. *The Menace of the Face.* Accepting the Challenge. The Threat. What the Face Saw on the Bluff. A Mysterious Visitor. The Fan-Bearer's Conspiracy.

Captain Mason and I occupied the same hut, but we held no converse that night before falling into heavy slumber. Christopher insisted on sleeping outside the door. If any of our party had thought it prudent to appoint a watchman, no suggestion to that effect was made; but there was no knowing what responsibilities Christopher assumed.

The sun was looking over the great wall when we assembled for breakfast. Every one had a brighter appearance. I had never seen men so terribly cowed as these since the storms had beaten them down. The women had looked beyond the hopelessness, and had tried to sustain the courage of the colony. Every man was now beginning to hold up his head.

Some of the despair had melted from Mr. Vancouver's face; it was clear that the lion in him was feebly straining. Mr. Rawley was recovering his aplomb. Annabel, having in her bearing an added depth and sweetness, had undoubtedly done much to accomplish that result with the two men, for there was something pathetic in the tenacity with which they clung to her.

On the barkentine, before the elements became destructive, she had been aloof toward the other women and the children; but on the beach, at the feast, and on the weary march to the valley, she had given a cheering smile, word, or deed to those about. The promise thus made was meeting fulfilment this morning. She had assumed charge of the breakfast preparations, and, seeing that Christopher yearned to do kindly service, had made him her executive. I often caught her look of wonder at his unfailing intelligence, patience, and gentleness in doing her bidding.

After breakfast the men began to talk among themselves. Captain Mason went over and said something to Mr. Vancouver, who shook his head, and the captain returned to me.

"Now that the men are rousing," he said, "it is time to organize. Mr. Vancouver declines to take the lead."

"You are the one for that," I declared.

"No. You have the military training and the tongue."

"But you have wisdom and a longer experience in discipline. Let's compromise. Take the leadership. I'll do your talking."

"Very well," he said. "There's no need to caution you, but the others ought to know; these trees may have ears. We need organization for defense."

At the end of a heartening address to the colony I called for the selection of a president. Mr. Vancouver named Captain Mason, who was elected. I was chosen his assistant, to Mr. Vancouver's evident annoyance. Dr. Preston, a young physician, was made superintendent of the camp.

The men squared their shoulders; the women's faces brightened. In a few words I urged against any restlessness, any plotting,—anything, in fine, that would have the faintest color of mistrust or disobedience toward the king. "Be patient. Hold together." That was the watchword.

Gato, the interpreter, soon appeared with a crowd of natives, and indicated that Christopher and I, with twenty picked men, should follow him. A short distance down the stream we came

upon cleared land, and were given our first lesson in farming. Our men winced under this and the indefinite term of imprisonment which it implied. But the word was passed round: "Wait. Be patient." The one hundred and fifty intelligent American men of us would find a way to match any ten thousand heathen under the sun. Blessed be the American brag! It is the front of something good behind.

The lesson was concluded in the early afternoon, for the sun was growing hot. Gato led us down the stream a mile to a low ridge stretching across the valley. Not a break in the great wall enclosing the valley was visible, except the thin cleft which had given us ingress; but I reasoned that at the lower end there must be a gorge through which the stream issued, although no sign of it could be seen. Gato made us understand that this transverse ridge was the boundary of our freedom. He pointed out two landmarks springing from the walls and marking the terminals of the ridge.

The one on the far side of the river was a barren bluff; opposite it, and forming part of the wall behind, there suddenly appeared a hideous caricature of a human face, a ferocious gargoyle, rudely fashioned by nature from the upper front of the cliff, protruding from the rock, and leering down horribly. It must have been a hundred feet from forelock to chin.

I withstood the shock badly, but was steadied by noting the deep satisfaction in Gato's eyes as he observed me. Unmistakably it was one of malignant triumph, instantly gone, but almost as disconcerting as the awful face itself. I felt that the ghastly apparition on the wall held a significance reaching the very depths of our fate. It was the embodiment of all the silent and implacable menaces hovering over the lethal fairness that environed us.

It had the blackish color of the rock, with reeking perpendicular streaks of green alternating with dull red. The forehead and chin receded in a simian angle; bulging eyes leered; below high cheek bones were mummy-like recessions, and hungry shadows filled them; the nose was flat, and the nostrils spread bestially.

Gato, informing us that his men would be on hand the next morning, took himself away. It gave a creepy sensation to note the snaky smoothness with which these men could sink out of sight.

Our party started for camp. A heaviness sat on me, and I did not wish to talk. Christopher and I fell behind, and the others left us. I could not bear that any but Christopher should see my perturbation. Several times I glanced back to see the face on the wall. Its malignancy grew even more terrible through the hazing distance, and I was glad when the forest shut it out. If the spectacle affected me so deeply, what greater hold must it not have had on the natives? And there was the significant look that I had caught from Gato.

On top of the opposite wall I discovered near the edge what appeared to be a large stone table, or altar, and its position with reference to the face suggested a sinister purpose.

Now that the men were gone, hopelessness fell upon me. Never had anything like such heavy responsibilities crept into my life. A sense of my inadequacy grew unendurable; and, overcome by weariness of soul and body, I flung myself on the ground and buried my face in my arm.

Christopher presently stepped away with a sprightliness quite unusual, but I had not the spirit to look up. Even returning footsteps and a low murmur of voices failed to stir me. I was recalled by Christopher's quiet remark:

"Some one to see you, sir.

I sat up, and discovered a native lad with him. His loose dress of blouse, trousers, and straw hat was of the commonest material. He was as unlike the native men as I had observed the fan-bearer

to be, but his manner was shy and timid, lacking the careless defiance of hers. With a finger on his lips he beckoned us to follow him.

In a secluded spot a little distance away, we sat down. My first surprise was when he began to talk. In a musical voice, he groped for words that I could understand, and in that way used a polyglot language, some words badly pronounced, and others spoken with surprising correctness.

First, he enjoined secrecy, for should the king learn that he had come—The lad finished with a grimace, and a swipe of the hand across his throat. He made me pledge the sun to burn me up, the moon to strike me a stark lunatic, and the stars to pierce me with their lances, should I betray his confidence,—all this solemnly, but with a twinkle in the back of his eye.

Second, he was Beelo, brother of the king's fan-bearer, Lentala, a good girl in a way, but—A droll shake of his head left her in the air. Lentala and he were protégés of the king and queen, and enjoyed uncommon privileges, having been members of the king's household since childhood. The queen was very sweet and gentle, and they were fond of her. She had no children of her own.

And, third, Lentala wished Beelo to come surreptitiously to me in order to learn English. She had a special reason for that. Neither the king nor any of the other natives must know. That was all. Would I teach him, that he in turn might instruct her?

Our conversation, carried on in a mixture of languages, must be here given in English.

"Indeed, I will, and gladly, Beelo!" I exclaimed; "but why not bring Lentala, that I may teach you together?" I seized his hand in my joy of this heaven-sent opportunity. It was a small, delicate hand.

"She *can't* come," he answered.

"Why not?"

"Why,—she's a girl!"

"But she might come with you." I was pleased with the discovery that the savage girl had the fine instinct which establishes self-guarding and self-respecting conventions.

"The distance is long. Girls have to wear skirts, you know, and girls are not as active as boys. Lentala, with her skirts, would be seen, and the king would find out. I can slip through anywhere."

I nodded resignedly. Only with the greatest difficulty could I refrain from asking him many questions; but how did I know that he was not a spy? In establishing relations with him I was playing with every life in the colony. I observed Christopher. His air of listening to distant voices was not present, and I felt reassured for the moment.

Beelo was anxious to begin; and he had his first lesson. Never had I found so eager and sweet-tempered a pupil, and his quickness was extraordinary. I drilled him first in the names of familiar objects.

"What is your name?" he plumped at me.

"Tudor."

"Tudor." He caught it with a snap, as though it were a ball. "You have another name?"

"Yes—Joseph."

He began a comical struggle with the J, laboriously twisting his tongue and lips as he pronounced the first syllable *Cho* as the Chinese, *Yo* as the German, *Zho* as the French, and *Ho* as the Spanish; but the English eluded him, and he gave it up, laughing sweetly. Often during the lesson I saw in his handsome deep-blue eyes—which were maturer than the rest of him—a dash of the mischief, the teasing, and the challenge that gave Lentala her sparkle.

"What is your name?" he demanded of Christopher, and pronounced it perfectly.

Christopher was gravely regarding the lad, who appeared disconcerted under the scrutiny. That disturbed me; but if the boy was seeking our undoing he would have to reckon with Christopher.

He was curious about Annabel, and sent her affectionate messages from Lentala.

“Beelo,” I demanded, “where did you learn all those words from foreign languages?”

Taken by surprise, he was confused and a little frightened, and had the look of a child preparing a fib.

“Other people have been shipwrecked here,” he answered, peering at me from under his brows. “I learned from them.”

“What became of them?” I asked.

He raised his head, and answered, “The king said he sent them away.”

“Did you visit them secretly?”

“N—o.” He began to play with twigs on the ground.

“Were they herded in this valley?”

“No.” His answer was firmer. “There was never more than one or a very few at a time.”

I sat silent so long that he looked up, and showed alarm.

“Tell me the truth, lad,” I insisted, holding his eyes. “Where did you learn those words?” A startling suspicion suddenly came. “The gold in your hair, the blue in your eyes, the fine lines of your face,—”

He began to edge away, and I saw flight in him; but I caught his wrist.

“Tell me the truth,” I repeated.

He gazed at me in fear and pleading, but found no yielding, and with provoking indifference shrugged his shoulders and settled down with a pouting, martyr-like resignation.

“You are hurting my wrist,” he remarked.

“Answer me,” I demanded, tightening my grip. “Hasn’t white blood mingled with some of the native blood here?”

His lips were compressed under the pain of my clasp, and an angry resentment steadied his gaze.

“Yes!” he answered, and a sudden change lit his face, as I unprisoned the wrist. “Don’t scare me that way again,” he said, half impudently shaking his head at me.

It seemed best to desist from pressing the matter further, and pleasant relations were soon re-established between us; but the matter seated itself in a corner of my mind.

Our lesson was delightful, and time escaped more smoothly than we knew. Beelo glanced at the sky, and sprang to his feet. He sweetly smiled his thanks, seized one of Christopher’s great paws and vigorously shook it, asked me and Christopher to meet him at the same spot tomorrow at the same hour, and was darting away. I called him back, and led him to an opening through which the face on the cliff was visible.

“What is that?” I asked, pointing to it.

He caught his breath, stood rigid, and slowly turned his face up to mine.

That on the cliff? It is nothing—only stone.”

“It is more,” I insisted. “It sits there, it looks down threateningly on the valley; it says as plainly as speech—”

“No, no!” cried Beelo, seizing my arm with both hands, and gazing up into my eyes. “It is one of the gods. The people invoke it—you may see the altar fire on the opposite cliff some night when there is a great storm and the sea is raging. The god brings fish to the king’s net.”

He broke off abruptly, and with alarm clapped his palm to his mouth. I put my hand on his shoulder and smiled reassuringly. His manner grew composed, and he darted away and disappeared.

On returning to camp I told Captain Mason of the adventure. He was deeply interested, and sat in thought.

“You’ve struck a lead,” he said. “Follow it—cautiously.”

CHAPTER IV. *Behind a Laughing Mask.* Captain Mason Strengthens the Defense. The Extraordinary Behavior of Beelo. Christopher Becomes a Savage. Hidden Motives Half Disclosed. Hope.

Foreseeing the time when a visible danger would bring mob-madness to the colony, Captain Mason gave his entire attention to strengthening his control. To that end he kept every one engaged at something, laughed away all fears and doubts, placed all on honor not to breed discontent, and required that all discussions of the situation be with him alone.

He impressed the danger of leaving the camp limits except in large parties organized under his authority. No spying savages were ever seen in the forest backing the camp, but I frequently found the captain using his keen eyes in that direction. The questions weighing on him were: When would the king ask for the first member of the colony to be sent away? What plan would be adopted in the selection? What would really become of the persons so taken? What should be done when the first call was made for deportation?

Christopher and I alone were in the president’s confidence. On the second night he informed us that he had selected a spot which would serve as a fortress if occasion rose, and instructed Christopher in the art of making weapons, chiefly stone-headed clubs and blackjacks. This work was done secretly in our cabin.

The daily teaching of Beelo developed a new interest in the fact that, before I was aware, I was a pupil as well as a tutor, and that Beelo was as assiduous in instructing Christopher as me; he was evidently anxious that we should master the native language. I was glad to humor him, especially as I suspected an intelligent purpose. Above that was my growing affection for him. He perfected his poor English so rapidly that I was put on my mettle to learn the island tongue.

It was a simple task, and we came to use it entirely. To my surprise, Christopher learned it as readily as I. From the very start he had helped Beelo to turn the teaching in that direction. The strangest element of all this procedure was the quick and sure understanding that sprang up between these two.

Beelo one day brought a large parcel. He was particularly happy, and as full of play as a kitten.

“Yon can’t guess what I have for you,” he said with a mischievous look.

“No, Beelo—what?”

“You’ll see.” He was opening the parcel. “You and Christopher are going to be Senatras.” Senatra was the name of the inhabitants.

He produced from the parcel two native costumes. In addition were a basin and some brown powder. The boy was in glee as he separated the articles into one array for Christopher and the other for me.

He ran to a little stream, fetched water in the basin, and with a comical seriousness dissolved part of the powder.

“Your arm, Christopher,” he demanded. At times Beelo’s manner had a touch of imperiousness that sat oddly with his youth.

Christopher obediently bared his powerful arm.

“Oh!” said Beelo in delight. “You have splendid muscles,—they are like iron; and you are very strong,—that’s good.” His finger was timid as it touched Christopher’s arm.

He dipped a cloth in the colored water, and rubbed the stain on Christopher’s white skin. His care and gravity in comparing the tint with the color of his own wrist, in shaking his head, in adding more pigment to the water and trying again, and at last his delighted satisfaction, were all very charming.

“Good!” he cried. “That’s the Senatra color. Now,” addressing me, “I’ll go away a little while. You make a Senatra of Christopher.” To Christopher:

“Take off everything. Mr. Tudor will put the color all over you. Then you put on Senatra clothes, and whistle for me.”

Patient Christopher would doubtless submit to any indignity that this prankish boy might devise, but I proposed to put a stop to the nonsense. Besides, how could I assume the ridiculous rôle that this young scamp, in whom my indulgence had bred impudence, intended for me?

“Christopher will do nothing of the sort,” I peremptorily said.

The lad stopped short and looked at me curiously.

“I want to, sir,” Christopher interposed, much to my surprise.

“You do? You wish to submit to this foolishness?”

“Foolishness, sir?”

“Yes.”

He reflected a while, and then said:

“Perhaps it ain’t jest foolishness, sir.”

“Very well,” I agreed, willing to humor him; “but Beelo will stay here and put the color on you himself.”

Alarm sprang to the boy’s face.

“I won’t!” he answered defiantly, and was turning away, but I caught him by the arm.

“You will,” I said. “I’ll see that you do.”

He slipped from my grasp and stood away, laughing. “I want to do it myself, sir,” meekly said Christopher.

Beelo precipitately fled.

Why not play with these children? A man who would not was a churl. So Christopher was arrayed as a Senatra, and a whistle called Beelo back.

He danced delightedly round the pitiful figure that Christopher made. It hurt me to see not only how patiently Christopher submitted, but how wholly he entered into the spirit of the masquerade. His pale eyes looked ghastly in his brown face. I called Beelo’s attention to that.

“Oh, that won’t be seen at night!” he exclaimed. The remark did not impress me at the moment.

He put Christopher through numerous gaits and tricks of manner peculiar to the Senatras, and praised him for his aptness. Finally, when he taught his pupil the art of creeping stealthily and noiselessly, the man was so terrible that I forgot his grotesqueness.

All through this singular performance, Beelo, even though half playful, displayed astonishing perseverance and thoroughness, as if life itself depended on the perfection of the drill. That might not have looked so strange had it not been for the extraordinary care of Christopher himself to accomplish a perfect imitation. Then the significance of it all burst upon me.

I had vowed a thousand times since first knowing Christopher that never again would I underrate his wisdom, yet over and over I found myself doing so. While he never laughed in his

romping with the children of the camp, but went into their sports with his habitual tender melancholy, he never showed with them the hidden eagerness, the almost desperate determination, that marked his training under Beelo. Thus I came to see that at the very beginning Christopher had discovered a vital meaning in Beelo's playing.

"And now," cried Beelo, "you will be a Senatra, Mr. Tudor! Christopher will dress you. Come!"

The boy's eyes softened in a moment under the new light that he found in mine.

"Beelo," I said, taking his hand, "let's sit down and talk." I seated myself, but he withdrew his hand and sat a little distance away. "No," I gently insisted; "here, facing me, and close."

He twisted himself round to the spot I indicated, and in doing so tossed Christopher a wry mouth. I noticed more clearly how fine his features were, and with what grace his long lashes curved.

"Beelo, do you really wish Christopher and me to be Senatras?" I asked.

He nodded, and, turning to Christopher, told him to go to the runnel, wash off the stain and put on his own clothes. Christopher meekly went. Beelo began playing with twigs on the ground, and did not look at me.

"Did Lentala tell you to do this?"

He nodded again—a little irritatingly, for he had a tongue.

"Why?" I asked.

He raised his eyes and regarded me steadily. Then, perhaps not seeing all that he sought, he made no answer, and returned to the twigs.

"I want to understand, Beelo, and you must trust me. Many things come to me now. Your sister's conduct at the feast meant that she wished us to obey the king. She showed us sincere kindness in every look and ad. And her great difference from the other people,—her sweetness, her grace, her beauty, her brightness of mind, her altogether adorable charm,

Beelo blazed in a way that stopped my rhapsody. He had raised his face; his lips were apart; his eyes glowed with a proud light that moved me strangely.

"You like my sister?" he softly asked.

"Who would not?"

"But *you!*" The boy impatiently tossed his head.

The little gesture was so pretty that I involuntarily smiled. Beelo misunderstood. He flashed angrily, and resumed the twigs. I could only grope.

"I don't understand why the king sent us here. We are prisoners, and that is something which brave men won't stand. We would rather die fighting."

Again he studied me, and again looked down.

"Why didn't the king let us build boats, and leave?"

He gave no answer, but was very busy with the twigs. I wondered if I were rash in some of the things I was saying. Clearly the moment of confidence had not arrived. The boy was studiously cautious.

"Beelo, go to your sister and beg her to come and see me. She will trust me more than you do. I know she is our friend. She would tell us what fate is awaiting us."

"No, she wouldn't," firmly interposed the boy.

"She would, because she is sweet and kind."

"No, she loves her people, and you might do them harm."

"But she sends you here to disguise us as natives and to train us in the art of deceiving and outwitting them."

Had his smile not been so winning I could have slapped him for his insolence; but it was soon evident that a mighty struggle was proceeding under his assumed carelessness. If I could only guess at its nature I might know how to proceed.

“Bring Lentala to me, Beelo. She would be safe with you, and she will understand and will trust me.

“Why? Her skin is brown. You would not trust her.” He was closely observing me.

“What difference can her color make!” I impatiently retorted. “Lentala is an angel.”

“But a brown skin means—” A look of horror swept over his face.

“Lentala is beautiful and kind and true. Tell her to come.”

Beelo was silent.

“Why should she not trust me?” I persisted. “How could I harm her?”

The boy, nervously arranging the twigs, spoke rapidly, but did not look up:

“She’s afraid,—not for herself, but her people. They love her. She would never betray them. Suppose she came,—you would be gentle to her; you would tell her she was beautiful and—and all that nonsense. You might try to get her to tell you things. And you would find out how to— Yes, you might come back and plot with your men, and there would be a great fight with my people and many would be killed. That would be terrible.”

I dimly understood at last: Lentala would trust her brother, not herself, in the mysterious plan that she was working out.

Christopher had returned. I beckoned to him to sit with us.

“Beelo,” I said, “look at me.” He complied. “If Lentala were here she could read my heart. All that you have said means that she mistrusts me. I understand more than you think I do. You have already shown your confidence and Lentala’s by offering to train me as a native. A wise and generous purpose is in that. By means of the disguise, you wish me to learn some things that will benefit my people, but you are held back by your fear that I will use the knowledge to injure you.

“No,” he hastily interrupted; “only my people.”

“Very well. But you have already shown trust. You simply want more assurance that I will keep faith with you. Tell me what you want. I will put my life in pawn,—I will give it, if that is demanded.”

His deep eyes were profoundly fixed upon me. In that moment Beelo disclosed a soul that had found maturity.

“You would do all for your people!” he impatiently cried. “You think only of them! Lentala and Beelo may do everything for you, but you never think what you might do for—Lentala and Beelo.”

The half-revelation in the passionate outburst brought me to my feet, and the lad slowly came to his.

“Beelo!” I said, “I hadn’t thought it possible. You and she are the favorites of the king and queen. You have everything you want. I don’t understand. Trust me! I can be a friend.”

He was looking up at me with eyes in which a pathetic anxiety struggled with fears. Instead of addressing me, he turned to Christopher and confidently took his hand.

“Christopher,” he said, “do you like me—and Lentala?”

“Oh, yes!”

“Very much?”

Christopher solemnly nodded.

“If—if we want to go away with you and your people, would you take us?”

“Oh, yes!”

“And be kind to us?”

“Me?” He turned to me, and so did Beelo.

“Yes, Christopher.”

“*He* will,” was the answer.

Beelo, seized with one of his unexpected whirlwinds, threw his arms round Christopher, and laughed.

I turned him about, and, holding both his hands, looked smilingly into his brilliant eyes.

“Show me the way to serve you and your sister, Beelo,” I said. “I alone, or Christopher and I together, will obey any instructions from you; we will do whatever you say, go wherever you direct,—cut ourselves off from every protection except yours. Isn’t our trust complete?”

“Yes, Yoseph—Choseph,” he banteringly answered. Then, in a flash, “I mean Mr. Tudor.”

“Joseph—to you,” I returned.

He put his mouth through contortions over the *J*, and finally, with a restful gasp, blurted out:

“Choseph!”

His gentleness overwhelmed me, and I, being naturally affectionate, and timid only with women, forgot my feeling of constraint toward him, and caught him in my arms. But he did not have for me the pressure and the laughter that he had given Christopher. On the contrary, he resisted and then sprang away.

I wondered what thoughts were perplexing him as he stood off, regarding me in his odd little quizzical fashion, and was astounded when he said:

“Lentala says that Annabel is beautiful and lovely.”

I could not imagine what had suggested Annabel to him at this particular moment, but I hastily agreed. He seemed not altogether pleased, but went on:

“You like her very much?”

“Yes; very much indeed.”

He looked a little sullen, but soon recovered, and broke out in a very rush of gay spirits. In a short time he suddenly became grave.

“I must go,” he said. With a gentle, pleading look at me, he asked: “Won’t you be a Senatra? Christopher will help you.”

“Yes, Beelo,—anything you wish.”

“Very well. I will come every day for—maybe three days, and teach Christopher. You will watch us. When you and Christopher are alone, he will teach you. But you must dress every time as a Senatra!”

“Of course.” My relief was great. For some incomprehensible reason I did not wish the boy to train me, for that would have necessitated a disagreeable loss of dignity before him.

“Good! And in three or four days,”—an oddly embarrassed expression rose in his face,—“would you like to go with me—you and dear old Christopher—to see—the beautiful—the kind—the true—Lentala?” He was mocking.

“Yes!” I answered, and made an effort to catch him; but he darted away, showering a cascade of laughter behind him.

So I was right in supposing that Beelo had been preparing us to penetrate the mysteries beyond the valley ramparts, and lift the veil behind which our fate was hidden.

“Christopher!” I cried in my joy, seizing him by the shoulder; “do you understand?”

“Yes, sir.”

CHAPTER V. *The Opening of a Pit.* Insolence and Rebellion in Camp. A Riot Averted. I Train for a Dangerous Rôle. Plotting Among Us for the Destruction of the Colony.

When Christopher began my training and pursued it with such amazing thoroughness, my feeling of being ridiculous disappeared. My love of adventure in these preparations was mingled with other emotions,—the fascination of hazard, a wish to risk everything for the colony, and a strong desire to see Lentala and solve the mystery of her whole conduct. Beelo was a will-o'-the-wisp.

Complications arose in camp. Although I had taken care to exercise my authority in a bland way, it became necessary at times to be severe. My greatest difficulty was inability to find the source of a disaffection working insidiously among the young men. Captain Mason had not observed it, lacking my opportunity, and I decided to be more positive and to find evidence before laying the matter before him.

I was intimately thrown with the men by directing the work on the farm. The labor was exhausting on account of the heat. For this reason, and because some men could bear the work better than others, and liked it, I called out only volunteers; but selfishness on the part of some who shirked brought grumbling. At first I had supposed that this was the origin of the dissatisfaction, but presently a deeper cause appeared to be in operation. As a test, and to secure fairness, I adopted a system of levying on all the able-bodied men and requiring each to do his share in turn.

In that way I came down on Rawley, who had never volunteered. When I informed him one evening that his turn in the fields would come next day, he stared at me in insolent silence.

That incident alone was not significant, but it made me alert, and I instructed Christopher to keep a strict and secret watch on the camp. A present necessity was to force the issue with Rawley, whose bearing was a threat to the harmony and safety of the colony.

He had not taken the trouble to absent himself from the tables when I called out the tale of men for the fields next morning, but lounged at indolent unconcern. Annabel was not visible. Mr. Vancouver, sitting near Rawley, had a suspiciously waiting air.

The young man did not rise with the others and prepare to go, but merely stared at me. I went near and said in a low voice:

“These men will resent your refusal.”

“Are you threatening me?” he said under his breath.

“Give my remark whatever construction you please,” I answered.

He could not hide his anger and fear, for a glance showed him a disquieting expression in the faces of the forty men waiting. Mr. Vancouver looked surprised and irritated as he studied them. The men in whom rebellion was stirring were such as he had always directed and commanded,—artisans, mechanics, clerks, sturdy and spirited every one, and loving fair play.

“Save yourself further trouble,” Rawley drawled in an effort to be nonchalant. “I’ll go—if I feel like it, and when I’m ready.”

Although the men could not hear him, they understood, and a murmur arose. One of them angrily said:

“He’s too good to work.”

Then came the outbreak.

“Put him under arrest! Duck him in the river! The snob!”

Annabel suddenly appeared. The men at once desisted, and she understood the situation at a glance. Her astonishment grew as her look of angry reproach at Rawley passed to her father and

found him silent and pale, as though for the first time he had seen the spirit of the common American.

She came to me and said: "Don't make trouble now. Be patient. You can find a way."

I turned to the men.

"Gentlemen," I said, "I must remind you that you have not been empowered by the colony to enforce its discipline. In this instance it is my task alone, and I propose to handle it as I think best, without your assistance, unless I call on you for it. Your attitude and remarks just now were rebellious, and, if allowed by those in authority, would disrupt us and place us at the mercy of savages. Leave this matter to me, and depend on me to see it properly adjusted. Mr. Vancouver needs Mr. Rawley today. Now to our work."

My speech affected the men in two quite different ways. Some, with a submissive glance at Mr. Vancouver who was watching me curiously, were instantly satisfied; others looked a little confused and rebellious, and were not cheerful in their obedience. They appeared a trifle uneasy, as though something might be afoot and they had not been informed. All of this sharpened my alertness.

After the day's work I had doubts as to whether I should report the incident to Captain Mason, who had not been present. I felt that something of an underground nature was at work, and that Mr. Vancouver was its focus. I could make allowance for a man shattered by adversity, but I supposed that Mr. Vancouver might have gathered himself up during the weeks we had been held as prisoners.

It turned out that he had. When Christopher came to give me my drill in the forest near the camp that day he brought disturbing information. Mr. Vancouver and Rawley, in order to be alone, had gone into the forest after I left for the fields, and talked. All that Christopher could learn was that Mr. Vancouver was carrying on secret negotiations with the king, and that a messenger from the palace was expected at a certain place within the forest in an hour.

My lesson was short that day. I sent Christopher to Captain Mason to report what he had heard, and to say that I would take the place of the native in the interview, if possible, trusting to the completeness of my disguise as a Senatra. Christopher was to be near for an emergency.

Skirting the spot where Mr. Vancouver was to meet the native, I intercepted him. It sickened me to see the sly confidence with which he approached. Meanwhile, I was aware of the great danger of discovery by the genuine messenger, for I knew the trailing skill of the natives, even though I led Mr. Vancouver as far from the meeting-place as necessary. But Christopher, who had acquired the native slyness, would know how to handle any embarrassing situation.

The discovery of Mr. Vancouver's seeming treachery had so disturbed me that I had some doubt of myself in the interview. The simple solution offered by strangling the man in the forest kept hammering at me with a dangerous persistency. We had taken it for granted that his interest in the colony was strong; no watch had been set on his liberty, which he had used in plotting.

I was measurably collected by the time we had seated ourselves on the ground. Being totally in the dark as to what had gone before, I was forced to extreme caution, and in addition was some danger of my betraying myself or of his discovering that I was not a native.

"Why didn't the other man come?" he demanded in his old peremptory manner.

In confusion, not knowing what degree of proficiency in English to assume, I gave some answer in a lame speech, the inconsistency of which he might have detected had he been less absorbed.

"What is the king's plan?" he asked.

"He wants to know yours first," I answered.

I was prepared for his quick, half-suspicious look. "He knows what I want," was the sharp return.

"The other native didn't know. He couldn't tell the king very well."

"This is my plan," went on Mr. Vancouver: "I make some good, strong men think that Captain Mason does nothing, but sits down and waits for us all to be killed. This is secret. A fellow named Hobart is my leader. The young men are ready to go with him out of the valley. The king will tell the guard to seize them and take them to the palace. That will get rid of the best fighters in the colony."

"What will the young men think they go for?" I inquired.

"What difference does that make," he testily demanded, "so long as they are out of the way?"

"The king must know." I was solid and firm.

"I'll make them think they can pass the guard; then they'll find a way for the colony to escape, and will come back and tell me."

"But they are not to come back."

Mr. Vancouver was silent, and his impatience grew.

"You will send them into a trap?" I persisted.

Again his suspicious scrutiny. "Does the king want them to come back?" he asked.

"I don't know. But he wants your plan."

"If they don't come back," Mr. Vancouver explained, "Captain Mason will be blamed for not knowing they were to go. Then his power will be gone. The colony will break up."

The ghastly perfection of the scheme overcame me for a moment, but I must learn what benefits Mr. Vancouver expected from this wholesale sacrifice.

"What do you want of the king?"

"I and my daughter and a young man named Rawley are to be taken care of, and—"

"You mean not killed?"

He writhed and reddened under the question, and under my sullen insistence.

Instead of answering, he hurried on: "I will show the king how to work the gold, silver, copper, diamond, and other mines, and how to make much money out of them. I will make treaties with other countries, and build forts, and make him a strong army. All this has to be done sooner or later, or the island will be taken."

"What is to be done with the other white people?" I demanded.

"The king knows."

"If I can't tell him he'll send me back." After a struggle with his anger, Mr. Vancouver said, "The king knows what he has done with other castaways."

"What do you think he has done with them?"

He started at me in a struggle with his patience, and said nothing.

"Do you think they were sent away?" I returned.

His fury broke. "No!" he exclaimed, and then suddenly checked himself.

"Then you think they are here yet?" I drove in.

He rose in a passion. "Tell the king to send me a man who isn't a fool!" he stormed.

"I will tell him," I quietly said, rising and starting away; but he halted me.

"Why do you ask those questions?" he said more composedly.

"The king told me to. He wants to know if he can trust you. If you want these people sent away,—"

"I don't! That would ruin everything. They'd send armies and war-ships, and—"

"Then, kept here—alive?"

“Certainly not! They’d kill me.”

I had known this to be the answer that I would wring from him; still the renewed impulse to strangle him was almost overpowering.

“I will tell the king,” I duly said, and was turning away, when another idea came. “Maybe he will first send for a man from your people. Which one do you want to go before the young men?”

“Tudor, Captain Mason’s assistant,” he answered with a vicious promptness. “Then, as soon as the young men are gone, I and my daughter and Rawley will go, and I will talk and plan with the king while the soldiers do their work here.”

The humor that I found in the turn, personal to me, which the situation had taken, lightened my spirit, and I thought of something else.

“Did the king send you any word about Lentala, his fan-bearer?”

“I talked with the man about her. I knew there was some mystery about her and that she was close to the king. I asked that she be sent to make the plans with me.”

His halt whetted my anxiety. “What did he say?”

“That she must know nothing about it, or she would break the plot.”

My heart choked me with its bounding. I had gained more than I had lost, but my heart was sore for Annabel.

“I must go,” I said. “Next time I come I will go to your hut in the night. Don’t come into these woods again. The soldiers—”

He understood, and looked relieved. After he had disappeared I sat down in a daze, trying to reason out the tangle. Rawley was in the plot, but Annabel was innocent.

A sound made me raise my head, and I saw Christopher and Captain Mason standing before me. Christopher’s face wore its customary vacancy, but Captain Mason’s had a startled look, as though he had beheld what is not good for a man to see. It appeared to have shriveled him.

“Before Christopher summoned me,” he dully said without any preliminary, “he found the native and sent him away. We have heard every word that passed between you and Mr. Vancouver.”