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The Flying Death

Samuel Hopkins Adams

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Chapter One

The Insomniac

Stanley Richard Colton, M. D., heaved his powerful form to and fro in his bed and cursed the day he had come to Montauk Point, which chanced to be the day just ended. All the world had been open to him, and his father's yacht to bear him to whatsoever corner thereof he might elect, in search of that which, once forfeited, no mere millions may buy back, the knack of peaceful sleep. But his wise old family physician had prescribed the tip-end of Long Island.

"Go down there to that suburban wilderness, Dick," he had said, "and devote yourself to filling your lungs with the narcotic ocean air. Practise feeding, breathing and loafing, and forget that you've ever practised medicine."

Too much medicine was what ailed Dick Colton. Not that he had been taking it. On the contrary he had been administering it to others. Amid the unbounded amazement of his friends, who couldn't see why the heir of the great Colton interests should want to devote his energies otherwhere, he had insisted on graduating from medical school, and, with a fashionable practice fairly yearning for him, had entered upon the grimy and malodorous duties of a dispensary among the tenement-folk. There, because the chances of birth had given him a good intelligence which his own efforts had kept brightened and sharpened, because Providence had equipped him with a comely and powerful body, which his own manner of life had kept attuned to strength and vigour, and because Heaven had blessed him with the heart and the face of a boy, whereof his own fineness and enthusiasm had kept the one untainted and the other defiant of care and lines, he had become a power in the slums. It was only by eternal vigilance that he had kept himself from being elected an alderman from one of the worst districts in New York.

There came a week of terrible heat when the tenements vented forth their half-naked sufferers nightly upon the smoking asphalt, and the Angel of Death smote his daily hundreds with a sword of flame. Dick Colton fought for the lives of his people, and was already at the limit of endurance when Fate, employing as its dismayed instrument a contractor with liberal views on the subject of dynamite, reduced the dispensary outfit in one fell shock to a mass of shattered glass and a mephitic compound of tinctures, extracts and powders. Only one thing was to be done, and the young physician did it. He stocked up again, attending to all details himself, using his own money and his own energy freely, and proving to his own satisfaction that strong coffee and wet towels about the head would enable a man to live and toil on four hours' sleep a night.

When, at length, a two days' rain had drenched the fevered city to coolness, Dick Colton drew a deep breath and said: "Now I'll go to sleep and sleep for a week."

But the drugs which for so many weary days had filled his entire attention declined now to be evicted from his thoughts. Disposing themselves in neatly labelled bottles, all of a size, they marched in monotonous and nauseating files before his closed eyes, each individual of the passing show introducing itself by some outrageous and incredible title utterly unknown to the art and practice of pharmacy. To think upon sheep jumping in undulatory procession over a stone wall, so the wisdom of our forebears tell us, is to invite slumber. To contemplate misnamed medicine bottles interminably hurdling the bridge of one's nose, operates otherwise. From the family doctor Colton had carried his vision to Montauk Point with him.

Now, on this cool September midnight he rose, struck a light, and found himself facing two neat, little, beribboned perfume jars, representing the decorative ideas of little Mrs. Johnston, the hostess of Third House. It was too much. Resentment at this shabby practical joke of Fate rose in his soul. Seizing the pair of bottles, he hurled them mightily, one after the other, into outer darkness. The crash of the second upon the stone wall surrounding the little hotel was rather startlingly followed by an exclamation.

"I beg your pardon," cried Colton, rather abashed. "Hope I didn't hit you."

"You did not--with the second missile," said the voice dryly.

"It was very stupid of me. The fact is," Colton continued, groping for an excuse, "I heard some kind of a noise outside and I thought it was a cat."

"Where did you hear it?" interrupted the voice rather sharply. "Did it seem to be on the ground, or in mid-air?"

Colton's frazzled nerves jumped all together, and in different directions. "Have I been sent to a private lunatic asylum?" he inquired of himself.

"Lest my manner of inquiry may seem strange to you," continued the voice, "I may state that I am Professor Ravenden, formerly connected with the National Museum at Washington, D. C., and that your remark as to an unrecognised noise may have an important bearing upon certain phenomena in which I am scientifically interested."

Dick Colton groaned in spirit. "Here I've told a polite and innocent lie to this mysterious pedant," he said to himself, "and of course I get caught at it." He leaned out of the window, when a broad, spreading flare of lightning from the south showed, on the lawn beneath him, the figure of a slight, compactly built man of fifty-odd, dressed with rigorous neatness in Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers, and carrying a broken lantern and a butterfly net. His thin, prim and tanned face was as indicative of character as his precise and meticulous mode of speech.

"Did I break your lantern?" asked the young doctor contritely.

"As I do not carry my lantern in the small of my back, you did not, sir," returned the professor with an asperity which reminded Colton that he had put considerable muscle into his throw. "A loose rock which turned under my foot upset me," he continued, "and the glass of my lantern was broken in the fall. The rising gale prevented my relighting it. Your opportune light, I may add, alone enabled me to locate the house."

"Perhaps my unintended rudeness may be pardoned because of my involuntary service, then," said Colton, with the courtesy which was natural to him.

There was a moment's pause. Then, "If I may venture to impose upon your kindness," said the man on the lawn, "will you put on some clothes and join me here? It is a matter of considerable possible importance--scientifically."

"Anything to avoid monotony," said the other, rather grimly. "I'm here for excitement, apparently."

Worming his way into a sweater, trousers and shoes, he went downstairs and joined his new acquaintance on the veranda.

"My name is Colton, Dr. Stanley Colton," he said. "What is it you want me for?"

"I wish the testimony of your younger eyes and ears," said the other. "Would you object to a walk of a third of a mile?"

"Not at all," returned the other, becoming interested. "Shall I see if I can rustle up a lantern?"

"No," said the professor thoughtfully. "I think it would be better not. Yes; decidedly we are better without a light. Come."

He led the way, swiftly and sure-footedly, though it was pitch-dark except when the lightning lent its swift radiance.

"I was out in search of a rare species of Catocala--a moth of this locality--when I heard the--the curious sound to which I hope to call your attention," he paused to explain.

He hurried on in silence, Colton following in puzzled expectation. At the top of a mound they stopped, and were almost swept off their feet by a furious gust of wind which died down, only to be succeeded by a second, hardly less violent. In a glare of lightning that spread across the south, Colton saw the fretted waters of a little lake below them.

"We're going to get that storm, I think," he said.

No reply came from his companion. In silence they stood, for perhaps ten or fifteen minutes. Then the wind dropped temporarily. Colton was wondering whether courtesy to the peculiar individual who had haled him forth on this errand of darkness was going to cost him a wetting, when the wind dropped and the night fell silent.

"There! Did you hear it?" the professor exclaimed suddenly.

Colton had heard, and now he heard again, a strange sound, from overhead and seeming to come from a considerable distance; faintly harsh, and strident, with a metallic sonance.

"Almost overhead and to the west, was it not?" pursued the other. "Watch there for the lightning hash."

The lightning came, in one of those broad, sheet-like flickers that seem to irradiate the world for countable seconds. Professor Ravenden's arm shot out.

"Did you see?" he cried.

Darkness fell as the query was completed. "I saw nothing," replied Colton. "Did you? What did you see?"

A clap of wind blew away the reply, if there was any. This time the wind rose steadily. They waited another quarter of an hour, the gale blowing without pause.

"This is profitless," said Professor Ravenden, at length. "We had best go home."

Thankful for the respite, the younger man rose from the little depression where he had crouched for shelter from the wind. With a thrill of surprised delight, he realised that he was healthily sleepy. The quick, hard walk, the unwonted exercise, and the soft, fresh sweetness of the air, had produced an anodyne effect. But was the *air* so sweet? Colton turned and sniffed up wind.

"Do you smell anything peculiar?" he asked his companion.

"Unfortunately I am troubled with a catarrh which deadens my sense of smell," replied the scientist.

"There's a peculiar reek in the air. I caught it with that last shift of wind. It's like something I've come across before. There!"

"Can you not describe it?"

"Why, it's--it's a sickish, acid sort of odour," said Colton hesitantly. "Where have I--Oh, well, it's probably a

dead animal up to windward."

As they reached the house, he turned to the other.

"What was it you thought you saw?" he asked bluntly. "What are you looking for?"

"I am not satisfied that I saw anything," answered Professor Ravenden evasively. "Imagination is a powerful factor, when the eye must accomplish its search in the instantaneous revelation of a lightning flash. As for what I am seeking, you heard as much as I. I thank you for your help, and, if you will pardon me, I will bid you good-night here, as I wish to make a few notes before retiring."

Leaving the professor busied by candle light at the desk in the main room, Dick Colton cautiously tiptoed up the stairs. At the top he stopped dead. From an open door at the end of the hall issued a shaft of light. In the soft glow stood a girl. Her face was toward Colton. Her eyes met his, but unseeingly, for he was in the shadow, and her vision was dazzled by the light she had just made. Her face was softly hushed with sleep and her dark eyes were liquid under the heavy lids. She was dressed in some filmy, fluffy garment, the like of which Colton did not know existed. Nor had he realised that such creatures as this girl who had so suddenly stepped into his world, existed. He held his breath lest the sweetest, softest, most radiant vision that had ever met his eyes, should vanish. The Vision pushed a mass of heavy black hair back from its forehead, and spoke.

"Father," it said.

In his sheltering shadow Colton stood rigid as a statue.

"Father," she said again. Then with a note of petulance in the soft, rippling voice. "Oh, Dad, you're not going out again."

"I beg your pardon," said Colton in a husky voice that belonged to someone whom he didn't know. "Your father is downstairs. I'll call him."

But the Vision had flashed out of his range. The light was shut out, and all that remained to him was the echo of a soft, dismayed, frightened little exclamation.

Having delivered the message to Professor Ravenden, and received his absent-minded, "In a minute," the insomniac returned to his room. Strangely enough, it was while he was striving to fix on the photographic lens of his brain every light and shadow of that radiant girl-figure, that the solution of the strange noise came, unsought, to him. He went to the foot of the stairs to tell the professor, who was still writing.

"I think I know what the sound was that we heard, Professor Ravenden," he said. "It was very like the rubbing of one wire on another."

"Very like," agreed the professor.

"Probably a telegraph or telephone wire, broken and grating in the gale, against the others."

The professor continued to write.

"Good-night," said Colton.

"Good-night, Dr. Colton," said the scientist quietly, "and thank you again. By the way, there is no wire of any kind within half a mile of where we stood."

Two problems Dick Colton took with him as exercisers of the processional medicine bottles, when he threw himself on his bed and closed his eye. It was not the sound in the darkness, however, but the face in the light that prevailed as he dropped to sleep.

Chapter Two

The Voice in the Night

Before the dream had fairly enchained him Colton was buffeted back to consciousness by a slamming of doors and a general bustling about in the house. He sat up in bed, and looked out over the ocean just in time to see a fiery serpent writhe up through the blackness and thrust into the clouds a head which burst into wind-driven fragments of radiance, before the vaster glory of the lightning surrounded and wiped it out.

"A wreck, I fear," said Professor Ravenden in the hall outside. "I shall go down to the shore, in case I can be of assistance."

"Indeed you shall not!" came a quick contradiction from the room at the end of the hall. "Not until I'm ready to go with you."'

It was the voice of the Vision. Colton observed that, soft as the tones were, a certain quality of decisiveness inhered in them.

"Can't Mr. Haynes bring you?" suggested the professor mildly. "I see a light in his room."

"He'll have his hands full with Helga. Please wait, Dad. I won't be ten minutes."

From downstairs rose a banging of doors, a tramping of feet and the gruff voice of Johnston, the host, mingled with the gentle remonstrances of his wife, in which a certain insistence upon rubber hoots was discernible. On the other side of Colton there was a swishing and thumping, as of one in hasty search for some article that had declined to stay put. "Where the devil is that sweater?" came in a sort of growling appeal to whatever Powers of Detection might be within hearing.

"Don't swear, Mr. Haynes," sounded in tones of soft gaiety from the end room, and the sweaterless one responded: "The half of it hath not been told you. Got a sweater to lend a poor man with a weak chest, Miss Ravenden?"

"I'm just getting into my one and only garment of the kind," was the muffled answer.

A second woman's voice, low, but with a wonderful, deep, full-throated sonance in it, broke in:

"My dream has come true," it said gravely. "The ship is coming in on Graveyard Point. How long, Petit Père?"

"With you in a minute, Princess. Just let me get into my boots," returned the voice of the seeker, but so altered by a certain caressing fellowship that Colton was half-minded to think he heard a new participant.

"Are you dressed already, Helga?" demanded Miss Ravenden. "How *do* you do it?"

"I hadn't undressed, Dolly," said the other girl, gravely. "I knew--I felt that something ----"

She paused.

"Helga's dreams always come to pass, you know," said the man of the elusive sweater half banteringly. "*What* infernal kind of a knot has that shoe lace tied itself into?"

"Pray God this dream doesn't come to pass," said the girl outside, under her breath as she passed Colton's door.

Another rocket and a third pierced the night and the response came, in a rising glow of light from the beach. "The life-savers are at hand," observed the professor below. "Make haste, daughter. If we are----"

A burst of thunder drowned him out.

"This," said Colton with conviction, as he dove into his heavy jersey jacket and seized a cap from a peg, "is going to be a grand place for an insomnia patient! I can see that, right at the start."

As he ran out of his door he collided violently with a small, dark, sinewy man who had hurriedly emerged from the opposite room.

"Don't apologise, and I won't," said Colton as they clutched each other. "My name is Colton. Yours is Haynes. May I go to the shore with you? I don't know the way."

"Apparently you don't know the way to the stairs," returned the other a trifle tartly. Looking at his keen, pallid and deeply lined face, the young doctor set him down as a rather irritable fellow, and suspected dyspepsia. "Everybody will be going to the beach," he added. "If you follow along you'll probably get there."

"Thanks," said Dick undisturbedly. It was a principle of his that the ill-temper of others was no logical reason for ill-temper in himself. In this case his principle worked well, for Haynes said with tolerable civility:

"You just came in this evening, didn't you?"

"Yes. I seem to have met the market for excitement."

By this time they had reached the large living-room, where they found Mrs. Johnston presiding with ill-directed advice over the struggles of her grey-bearded husband to insert himself into a pair of boots of insufficient calibre.

"Twenty-five years of service in the life-savin' corps an' ain't let to go out now without these der-r-r-ratted contraptions!" he fumed.

A splendid, tawny-haired girl in an oilskin jacket stood looking out into the night, her eyes vivid with a brooding excitement. She turned as Haynes came in.

"Are you ready, Petit Père? I'm smothering in these things."

Expressively she passed her hands down along the oilskins, which covered her dress without concealing the sumptuous beauty of her young figure.

Filled as was Colton's mind with the image of another face, he looked at her with astonished admiration. Such, thought he, must have been the superb maids in whose inspiration the Vikings fought and conquered.

"If you knew what a gallant wet-weather figure you make," Haynes answered her (Colton wondered how he could ever have thought the face disagreeable, so complete was the change of expression), "your vanity would keep you comfortable."

"Dinna blether," returned the girl, smiling with affectionate comradeship, and slipping her arm through his to draw him to the door. "Father's boots are on at last."

"We're to have company," said Haynes. "Mr. Colton--I think you said your name was Colton--wants to come along."

"I'm sorry that you should have been awakened," said the girl, turning to him. "You don't mind rough weather?"

"At least I'm not likely to blow away," returned the young man good-humouredly, looking down at her from his six-feet-one of height. Inwardly he was saying: "You are never the daughter of that weather-beaten old shore man and that mild and ancient hen of a woman."

Haynes, who had caught up a lantern and was moving toward the door, turned and said to him: "You had better keep between Mr. Johnston and myself. What are you waiting for?"

"Aren't there others coming? I thought I heard someone upstairs speak of it." He paused in some embarrassment, as he realised the intensity of his own wish to see that dark and lovely face again.

"Oh, Dolly Ravenden. Her father will bring her," said Miss Johnston. "We shall meet them at the beach."

With heads bent, the four plunged out into the storm. The wind now was blowing furiously, but there was little rain. Over the sea hung a black bank of cloud, from which spurted great charges of lightning. Colton, implicitly following his guides, presently found himself passing down a little gully where the still air bore an uncanny contrast to the gale overhead. Hardly had they entered the hollow when Haynes checked himself.

"Did you hear it?" he said in a low voice to the girl.

Colton saw her press closer to her companion, shudderingly. She poised her head, staring with great eager, sombre eyes, into the void above.

"When haven't I heard it, in my dreams!" she half whispered.

"There!" cried Haynes.

"Yes," said the girl. "To seaward, wasn't it?"

On the word, Colton, straining his ears, heard through the multiform clamour of the gale aloft the same faint, strange, wailing note of his earlier experience, not unlike the shrieking of metal upon metal, yet an animate voice, infinitely melancholy, infinitely lonely.

"It chills me like a portent," said Helga.

"Never mind, Princess," reassured Haynes, in his caressing voice. "It was stupid of me to say anything about it, and make you more nervous."

"Nervous! I never knew I had nerves--until now." She turned to Colton.

"Did you hear it too?"

"Yes. What was it?"

A furious flurry of the gale intervened. The girl shook her head. Johnston in the lead now turned to climb a grassy knoll, and conversation became impossible.

At the top they came in view of a score of busy figures outlined sharply against a lurid background as the lightning spread its shining drapery from horizon to zenith. Presently the four people from Third House stood on the cliff overhanging the sledge-hammer surf, and watched the life-saving crews of two stations, Bow Hill

to the east, Sand Spit to the west, play their desperate game for a hazard of human lives. Straining their eyes, they could discern, in the whiteness of the whipped seas, a dull, undefined lump, which ever and anon flashed, like a magician's trick, into the clean, pencilled outlines of a schooner, lying on her beam ends, and swept by every giant comber that rolled in from the wide Atlantic. She lay broadside to the surges, harpooned and held by the deadly pinnacled reef of Graveyard Point.

Chapter Three

The Sea-Waif

Of the scores of little capes that jut out from Montauk, there is none but is ghostly with the skeleton of some brave ship. Three such relics were bleaching their still vertebrate bones on the rocks where the schooner lay trapped. It was only too evident that a like fate was ordained to her, and that the promptest action of the lifesavers alone could avail the ten huddled wretches in her rigging.

What man could do, the crews of the two stations were doing; and now, in a sudden lull of wind, they sent a life-line over her. One of the men came over to the Third House group, and spoke to Helga Johnston, bending so close that she shrank back a little.

"Can't last--hour," came to Colton's ears in sentences disjointed by the wind. "Old wooden--pound pieces. Get most of 'em--life-buoy--all right."

At a word from Miss Johnston, Haynes shouted in Colton's ear: "Come down to the beach. When she smashes, some of 'em may come in there."

"Not alive surely?" cried Colton, glancing at the surf.

"Yes," the girl's clear voice answered, with an accent of absolute certainty. "We must watch."

Down a sharp declivity they made their way to the gully, which debouched upon a sand beach. Johnston, the veteran, who had preceded them, was gathering driftwood for a fire, with a practical appreciation of the possibilities.

"Bear a hand, Helga!" he shouted. "And you, Mr. Haynes!"

Almost before he knew it, Colton too was hard at work dragging timber to the centre marked by the lanterns. A clutch on his arm called his attention to what was going on above him, as Johnston pointed seaward. In the glint of the lightning, he saw clear against the windy void a huddled mass, at which the waves leaped and clutched, as it moved steadily shoreward. Another glimpse showed it risen above the reach of the breakers. It was a breeches-buoy, bearing its first burden.

"Line's working all right!" yelled the old coastguard. "They ought to get 'em all in."

Presently another traveller came in foot by foot over that slender and hopeful thread, then a third and a fourth, until seven of the crew were huddled on the cliff. Out went the breeches-buoy again, for there were three lives yet to be saved, when in a broad electric glare a monster surge could be seen sweeping the schooner up. There was a crash of timbers, a wild cry, and the line fell slack from the cliff-head. Old Johnston dropped to his knees on the sand and bared his head, but only for a moment; for he was up again and had set the pile of fuel burning with a cleverly placed twist of paper.

Up leaped the flames. A brilliant glow wavered and spread. Colton, stupid with horror, stood entranced, while Johnston, Helga and Haynes ran, as if to established stations, along the surf's edge, the old man nearest the wreck, then Haynes, and finally the girl. Of a sudden, Colton came to himself with a dismal and unaccustomed sensation of being out of it. No one had asked him to help. He was just a guest, a negligible quantity when men's and women's work was to be done.

"What a useless thing the average summer boarder must be!" he thought, as he passed beyond the girl and bent his attention on the boiling cauldron of the ocean.

He had not long to wait. On the foaming crest of a breaker something dark appeared, and vanished in the smother of the surge as it whizzed up the sand. Another instant, and it was rolling within a rod of the young fellow, showing the set, still face of a man. Colton hardly had to wade ankle-deep to seize the form; but the back drag tore at his feet with a power that amazed and appalled him. To haul the man ashore took all his unusual strength. As he threw the form over his shoulder and ran toward the fire, he became aware of a man and a woman approaching from the cliff side. Laying down his burden, he knelt beside it. One look was enough. The man's skull had been crushed like an egg-shell. Mechanically he felt for the pulse, when Professor Ravenden's precise tones, rendered a little less pedantic by the effort required to overcome the gale, reached his ear:

"Perhaps I can be of some service. I am not entirely unskilled in medical subjects."

Colton shook his head. "He's beyond all skill," he answered.

"Oh!" cried a voice from the darkness behind the professor, rising to a shriek. "Look! Helga! Help her!"

At the same moment, Helga's own ringing voice sounded in a call for aid, abruptly cut short. Colton jumped to his feet and turned. He saw, with a sickening recollection of the waves' power, which he had just experienced, the girl up to her knees in water, her strong young frame braced back and her arms clasping a body. A fringed comber, breaking heavily, was driving a vortex of white water in upon her. It boiled up beyond her, until the two figures were gone. As Colton, with a shout of horror, leaped forward, like a sprinter from the mark, he saw Haynes, running with terrific speed, launch himself head foremost into the swirl of waters, at a rolling mass there.

"Lord! What a tackle!" thought Colton as he ran. "Yet they say that a foot-ball education is of no practical use."

His own was to come swiftly into play. For though Haynes had caught Helga about the knees, he had no purchase for resistance, and the deadly undertow was dragging them out.

Colton had the athlete's virtue of thinking swiftly in the stress of action. His was the cool courage that appreciates peril and reasons out the most advantageous encounter. The human flotsam was far beyond his grasp now; but he figured that an approaching surge, sweeping them in shoreward again, would give him his chance,--the only chance,--for the recession in all probability would carry them beyond help. He must meet them feet forward, as a trained player meets and falls upon a foot-ball rolling toward him; thus he might get his heels into the sand, and so anchor them all against the back-drift. If he could not--well, there were no *materia medica* bottles out there beyond the surf anyhow, and an ocean lullaby would be the sure cure for all sleeplessness.

Fortunately the coming wave was a broad-backed one, on which the tangled figures rode in plain view, and Colton saw, with that thrill of pride in his fellow-being which courage wakes in the courageous, that the girl's arms still clasped her trove, clinging below the life-preserver which was fastened around the man's body. Calculating the drift down the beach, Colton moved forward. In they came--nearer--nearer--and to his amazement Colton heard a strangled shout from the waves:

"Get Helga! Never mind me. Get Helga in!"

"I'll get you too, or break something," muttered the young man, as with a rush and a leap he plunged feet forward to meet the onset.

It was Haynes that he caught, just above the knees. His heels sunk in the sand. The surge spread, stood, receded. "Here's tug-of-war in earnest," thought Colton, as he set the muscles which had helped to win many a

victory for his college. The next instant it seemed as if those muscles must rend apart; as if all the might of the unbounded ocean was straining to drag away his prize of lives. He set his face grimly toward the savage waves. His chest was bursting. One heartbeat more he would hold out. Human endeavour could go no further. That heart-throb sledged against his ribs, passed and found the bulldog grip unrelaxed. One more, then! surely the last; after that--abruptly the strain slacked.

A sob of compressed breath burst from Colton. Oh, how good was the full, deep inhalation that followed! How it filled the muscles and inspired the will to the final effort! With a mighty heave he rolled the three clear over his own body up the beach. Then he lay still, for he was tired and sleepy and didn't care what became of him. He had made a touch-down--anyway. Why didn't--somebody--pull--them off--him?

"I've got 'em!" twittered a voice in his ear, a dim and ridiculous voice, that nevertheless was like old Johnston's. "You saved the lot, God bless you!"

"Let me get my arm under his shoulder," said the calm and precise accents of Professor Ravenden, also in that strange faraway tone.

Oh, thought Dick in sudden but dim enlightenment, they were telephoning. Of course. That's the way voices sounded over a 'phone when the wire was working badly. But why should they be telephoning? And how, at the other end of a wire, could they be hauling him, Dick Colton, to his feet?

When consciousness came in on the full flood, Colton found himself staggering toward the fire, with someone's support. From out the flickering circle of light an angel came to meet him. She seemed a thing born of the wedding of radiance and shadows. The whiteness of her face, rich-hued where the blood flushed the cheek, was enhanced by the dusky masses of her hair. Her lips were parted, and her rounded chest rose and fell palpably with her swift breathing. Her eyes, deep, velvety with the soft glamour of questing womanhood in their liquid depths, looked straight into his. It was his Vision of the hallway.

"Ah, it was splendid!" she said, and there was a thrill in the soft drawl of the voice that went straight to his heart.

She moved forward toward him into the fuller glow of the fire, and Colton, his hungry eyes fixed on hers, thought of the moon emerging from behind a filmy cloud.

"How did you dare?" she pursued. "You saved them all! I--I--want you to take this."

Mechanically he stretched forth his hand to meet hers, and she pressed into it something light and soft.

"It was nothing," he said dazedly, wondering. "Thank you. I--my head feels queer--but I--think--I--could--go to sleep--now."

He lay gently down on the soft sand, which seemed to rise to meet him. Half swooning and wholly engulfed in sleep, he stretched his great bulk and lay gratefully down, and the *materia medica* bottles trooped out into the troubled night and were lost in its depths.

Dolly Ravenden stood and looked down, musing upon the strong-limbed figure, and at the hand whose fingers, alone of all the frame, were unrelaxed.

"I wonder if I've made a mistake," she said with misgivings which were strange to her positive and rather self-willed character. "Pshaw! No; it is all right."

Chapter Four

The Death in the Buoy

Half an hour's sleep is short rations for a man who has experienced little untroubled unconsciousness for five weeks. Colton struggled angrily against the flask.

"I don't want it, I tell you! Go to the devil and take it with you." He struck out blindly, angrily. A cool, firm hand closed around his wrist.

"You must get up," said Helga Johnston's voice firmly. "Swallow some of this brandy."

"I'm sorry," said Colton penitently. "Did I curse you out? Please let me sleep."

The girl was quick-witted. "We want your help," she said.

Colton sat up. She had struck the right note. Docilely he took the brandy, and got to his feet.

Haynes came up and steadied him. "Miss Johnston and I have our lives to thank you for," he said briefly. "You'd better get home. Some of the lifesavers will help you."

"No, I'm all right," declared Colton. "Where's the man Miss Johnston saved? Let's have a peep at him. I'm a physician."

"Are you?" said Haynes eagerly. "Then I want you to look at one of the men on the cliff, as soon as you've finished with Helga's waif."

Colton looked around him, memory now aroused. "Professor Ravenden!" he said. "I want to thank him for getting me out."

"He and Miss Ravenden have gone to the station," said Helga, "to help care for the rescued men. The captain and the mate have been washed in, dead."

"Oh," said Colton blankly. His mind was still blurred. He looked at his tight-clutched left hand and wondered if there was something inside. Cautiously he opened it, looked, started, choked down an exclamation, and thrust the hand into the pocket of his dripping trousers. Then he walked over to the man whom Miss Johnston had saved.

Someone had stripped the life-preserver from the castaway's body, and as he lay sprawled upon the ground Colton noted the breadth and depth of the chest, remarkable in so small a man. He was swart, so swart as obviously to be of Southern European extraction. In spite of the sea's terrific battering, he apparently had escaped any serious injury, and already had regained consciousness; but, to Colton's surprise, kept his head buried in his arms. From time to time a convulsive shudder ran through him.

"Seems to be kind of crazy-like," volunteered old Johnston, who stood beside him. "Begged me, with his hands clasped, to help him out of the light of the fire, first thing."

"How do you feel, my friend?" asked the young doctor, bending over the survivor.

The man lifted a dark and haggard face. "To a house! Take me to a house! I weesh to go inside!" His voice was a mere wheeze of terror.

"We'll get you to a house presently," Colton assured him, presenting the brandy flask to his lips, "Can you make out to climb that cliff?"

"Up there? So plain to be see? No, no!" cried the man vehemently, roving the dark heavens with his eyes.

Colton looked at him in perplexity. The man got painfully to his feet, and cupped a hand to his windward ear.

"I t'ink I hear eet again," he whispered, and shook like a rag in the wind.

"What are you talking about?" asked Colton.

"Somesing up zere," said the stranger, thrusting both hands in an uncouth and fearful gesture upward and outward.

"Oh, you're not quite yourself yet," said Colton.

"I tell you I hear eet!" broke out the man with extraordinary vehemence. "I feel eet! What? I do not know. But when eet come back"--he made a motion as of a winged creature swooping--"I fear an' I jump into ze waves." A harsh tremour went through his frame and left him panting.

"You jumped?" said Johnston. "When she broke up?"

"No. Before. Before she break."

"He's crazy," said the old life-saver. "What'd you jump for?"

"Eet come after me," shuddered the man. Again he made that extraordinary gesture. "Take me to a house out of ze night."

"Someone must go with him to the station," said Colton.

"Let me," Helga Johnston volunteered.

The stranger faced the girl, and advanced a swift step. It was a meeting of satyr and goddess. Suddenly the satyr cast himself at the goddess' feet and kissed them. Startled, she drew back.

"Eet is you that safe me!" he cried, lifting wild and adoring eyes to her. "I see you just before all go black. You walk out on ze wave to reach me."

"Come along, you!" cried old Johnston, lifting him to his feet. "No such heathen goin's-on for my Helga. Not that I think you know what you're doin'," he added.

"You mustn't go with him alone, Princess," said Haynes quickly. "He seems to be insane."

"Father will go with me," she replied; "though I'm safe enough. It isn't there the danger lies."

"Helga," said Haynes seriously, "I wish you wouldn't let yourself be so influenced by your dreams."

"I'll try not to, Petit Père," said the girl gently. "But, look how it has all come about. Yet I can't see how a strange creature like that could possibly influence all our lives."

"You don't half believe it yourself," said Haynes positively.

"Sometimes I don't," she agreed. "But we who are born of the sea, dream the sea's dreams, you know, Petit Père."

"Well, get into dry clothes as soon as you get to the station, Princess. Oh, and get me that fellow's name and address, will you?"

"Yes," said the girl, as, with her father, she led her strange charge away toward the Sand Spit station.

"Now," said Haynes to Colton, "will you come up on the cliff and look at my man?"

Together they clambered to the top. In the light of the dying fire they saw the man stretched out near the brink of the cliff.

Another of the wrecked sailors and two lifesavers stood over him. One of the life-savers Colton recognised as the guard who had come over to speak to Helga Johnston, a hulking, handsome fellow named Serdholm, from the Sand Spit station. The other was a quiet-looking young fellow of the Blue Hill corps, Bruce by name. As Haynes and Colton approached, Bruce drew away a coat which was spread over the prostrate figure, and lifted his lantern.

"He is dead," said Colton at once.

"Yes," replied Haynes; "but see how he came by his death."

Rolling the body over, he exposed a deep, broad, clean-driven wound through the back. "What do you make of that?" he asked.

Colton examined it carefully. "I don't make anythin' of it," he said frankly, "except that the poor fellow never knew what struck him."

"What did strike him?"

"A very large blade, sent home with tremendous force, apparently."

"By some other person?"

"Certainly not by himself; and it doesn't seem like accident. Was he washed ashore this way?"

`'Supposing I told you that the man left the ship, alive and sound in the breeches-buoy, and got here in this condition."

"Does the buoy carry more than one at a time?"

"No."

"Then it isn't possible."

"Well, there's plenty of evidence as to his arrival. Now let's see about his departure. Were you aboard when this man left the schooner?" Haynes asked, turning to one of the two sailors at hand.

"Yes, sir. Me an' Darky John came after him. We helped fasten him in."

"Who else was there?"

"The Old Man, an' Buckley the mate, an' that queer Dago feller."

"There wasn't any fight or trouble about who should come first?"

"No, sir. The Old Man gave his orders. Petersen, here, he leaves fifth, I think. 'Good-bye, boys. See you later,' he says, an' off he goes. Next I see of him, he lies here dead. What killed him or how, I don't know, no more than a blind fish."

"Straight enough story," commented Haynes, "particularly as Hawkins, the coloured man, gives the same version. We'll try the foreigner later. I want to get to the bottom of this. If murder has been done in mid-air, between the reef where the schooner lay and this cliff, it's about the strangest case in my experience."

"How are you so sure it's murder?" demanded Serdholm the life-guard. "Anyone can make out murder if they're looking for sensation hard enough." There was an undisguised hostility in his tone as he addressed Haynes which surprised Colton.

"Why do you think it wasn't?" asked Colton quickly.

"Did I say I thought it wasn't?" retorted the guard. "Maybe it was; but I've seen a sharpened stake shoved clean through a man in a surf."

"You needn't be so fresh about it, Serdholm," put in the other guard. "It's true, though, what he says, Mr. Haynes," he added. "And there was plenty of driftwood afloat."

Colton bent over the dead man again. "It's almost too clean an incision for anything except steel," he said. "Besides, wood leaves splinters."

"You saw the man come in?" Haynes asked Bruce.

"Helped to lift him out. Look!" He held out his hands, showing great stains of blood.

"You didn't see anything that would give a clue?"

"No, I didn't see anything," returned Bruce after a moment's consideration; "but some of the men thought they heard a scream, when he was about halfway in. It was just after a lightning flash. They thought a bolt might have gone through him."

"Lightning doesn't wound that way," said Colton.

"No, I didn't think so. But I thought I'd better tell you. Only in the noises of a gale you can hear all sorts of voices."

"They didn't say anything about a kind of rasping, creaking sound?" asked Haynes after a moment's hesitation.

"No, sir," said the man, surprised. "Nothing like that."

Haynes turned away impatiently. "Come down to the Blue Hill station," he said to Colton. "We'll see if Miss Johnston's patient can throw any light on this."

During the walk Haynes was so deeply in thought and replied to Colton's questions so curtly that the latter fell into silence. At the door of the station they were met by Helga.

"How's your salvage, Princess?" queried Haynes. "Able to stand a cross-examination?"

"More than able--willing," replied the girl with a smile. "He's been telling us all about himself. Nothing queerer than he ever came ashore on Montauk. I'm afraid the sea-water has got into his brain a little."

"Tell us what he said."

"In the first place, he is some sort of a travelling juggler and magician. As soon as he is recovered he will give us a private exhibition in honour of his rescue. He calls himself 'The Wonderful Whalley,' though his real name is something like Cardonaro. An injury to his hand stranded him in Maine, and he took passage on the *Milly Esham* because it was a cheap way to New York. Age, forty-two; nationality, Portuguese; occupation, the theatrical profession. Anything else, Petit Père?"

"Good work! Did he say anything of a man's being killed on board!"

The girl's face became grave at once. "No," she said. "How was he killed? Who was it?"

"A sailor named Petersen. He was stabbed, and came ashore dead."

"The man has two enormous knives in sheaths fastened to his belt," she said, turning white. "He uses them in his performances."

Haynes and Colton looked at each other.

"If he did it, he wasn't responsible," Helga went on impetuously. "He's such a pitiful creature--just like a dog, with his great eyes. I feel as if we had saved a baby. And he is terrified like a baby."

"At some phantom of the darkness?"

The girl nodded. "Something that he hasn't even seen. He thinks it came down from the upper air after him as the ship was going to pieces. While the others were being taken off in the breeches-buoy he was crawling down the main ratlines to escape from this thing. Finally his fears drove him overboard."

"Just as well for him," said Colton. "If he had stayed he would have been killed in the wreckage with the mate and captain."

"Dr. Colton thinks the man is insane," said Haynes. "What is your view, Princess?"

"I think so too. But I think some strange thing has terrified him. Perhaps one of the sails tore loose and blew on him. Or it may have been the lightning."

"That might be it, and in his panic he may have struck out and killed Petersen by accident. But in that case, why should the other sailors, who must have seen it, shield him? I guess the best thing is to put it to him straight," concluded Haynes.

Followed by Colton, he went into the room where the suspect lay.

"See here!" began Haynes abruptly. "We want to know why you killed Petersen the sailor."

The stranger's dark eyes widened. He stared at his questioner with dropped jaw.

"Yes; why you killed him--with this." Haynes touched the hilt of one of the knives that protruded from the

man's belt.

"No, no!" protested the man. "I not got nothing against Petersen. I not know Petersen."

"You were on board when he left?"

"Yes; I see zem go--one--two--three--so many--seven. Not me; I haf to stay. No one care to safe ze wonderful Whalley."

"Did you see anyone fight with Petersen or strike him?" asked Colton.

"No; see nothing."

After fifteen minutes of fruitless cross-questioning the investigators called in the negro, Hawkins.

"Him kill Petersen?" repeated Hawkins. "No--sir--ee, boss! He watn't nowheyah nigh when Petersen went off, safe an' wavin' his hand goodbye."

"Someone killed him," said Haynes. "This man, yourself, Corliss and the captain and mate were the only ones aboard."

"That's right, boss. Corliss and the Old Man and I stood right by and saw him off. No, sir, if he watn't killed by the lightnin' or on the cliff, somethin' got him on the way in."

"You think he may have met his death after he landed, then?"

"No, sir; that cain't hardly be," replied the negro after a moment's consideration. "Some of our crew was in a'ready. The life-savers was there. Couldn't anyone a-give it to him without the othahs seein' it."

"So, you see, he must have been dead when he left the ship. Now, Hawkins, you'll save yourself trouble by telling me what you know of this."

" 'Fo' Heaven, boss, I do' know a livin' thing!" And nothing more could Haynes get from the negro.

After dismissing him, Haynes said to Colton:

"You go around, and under pretence of looking after their injuries, question all the sailors as to whether there was bad blood between the dead man and any of his shipmates. I've got some work to do."

At another time the young doctor might have resented the assumption of authority, but now he was too deeply interested in the case. Half an hour later he returned empty of results.

"Not a bit of trouble that I can get wind of. What's that you're writing, a report for the coroner?"

"No; this will never get to the coroner. I'm certain it's a murder; but I'm equally certain that there's no case against any individual. I'm writing up the wreck for my paper."

"Are you down here working?" asked Colton.

"No, I'm on vacation; but a reporter is always on duty for an emergency like this."

"You're Harris Haynes of *The New Era*, aren't you?" asked Colton. "You're the man that proved the celebrated

Bellows suicide and saved Dr. Senderton."

"He saved himself by telling a straight story, even though it seemed damaging, where most men would have tried to lie," said Haynes. "Anyone except a Central Office detective would have had the sense to know that the letter was written to bear out a grudge. They never should have arrested him."

"I was one of the men called in on the case. You've shaved your beard, or I should have remembered you."

"Well, we shan't have any such satisfactory result in this case," said the reporter. "Hello! What's Bruce doing down here?"

The life-guard from the Bow Hill station came hurrying to him. "They've just got in the life-line, Mr. Haynes," he said, "and I examined it as you told me. It's blood-soaked in the middle, and there are blood-stains all along the shoreward half. There's nothing on the end toward the ship."

"Great Scott!" cried Colton, as the meaning of this poured light into his mind. "Then the poor fellow was killed between the ship and the shore!"

"It looks that way," said Haynes, scowling thoughtfully. "No, by Jove, it can't be! I've missed a trick somewhere. There's some other explanation."

"Mightn't the blood-stains have got washed out?" suggested the guard.

"Why should half of the rope be clean and not the other half, then?" countered Haynes. "You didn't make a mistake as to which was the shore end of the buoy rope?" he cried in sudden hopefulness.

"Bit o' spar came in with the clean end," returned Bruce briefly, and that hope was gone.

"It's at least curious," observed Colton thoughtfully, "that the juggler's shrinking from some aerial terror should so correspond with a murder in mid-air."

"You're becoming pretty imaginative," retorted the other disagreeably. "This crazy Whalley stabbed Petersen aboard the ship. What his motive was, or how he got away with it, or why the others don't give him away, is beyond me. But he did the job, and this bogy-man scare of his is the weak cunning of a disordered mind to divert suspicion. Circumstantial evidence to the contrary, that's what's what!" Then, with his quick change of tone: "Princess! Oh, Princess!"

"What is it, Petit Père?" said the girl.

"Will you come along home with us?"

"Right away. We don't always welcome our guests with so much excitement, Dr. Colton," she added, as she slipped her arm through Haynes'. After a moment's pause she asked him:

"Do you think Paul Serdholm knows anything of the--the murder?"

"Why?"

"Because he thinks you believe he does. And he's ugly about it. Do watch him, Petit Père. He doesn't like you, you know."

"Ah," said Haynes as the three set out across the billowy grass-land. "Perhaps he'll bear a little watching."

They walked in silence, home. Once Helga stopped short on a hill-top and turned her face toward the sea, listening intently, but almost immediately shook her head.

Dick Colton got to bed just before dawn, with a mind divided in speculation between the mystery of the dead man and the more personal mystery of a small, wadded treasure in his pocket.

Chapter Five

The Cry in the Dusk

Montauk Point rises and falls like a procession of mighty swells fixed in eternal quietude and grown over with the most luxurious of grasses and field-blooms. One walks from hill to hill, passing between the downcurving slopes to hollows wherein flourish all-but-impenetrable thickets of the stunted scrub-oak, and abruptly walks forth upon a noble cliff-line overlooking the limitless ocean to the far-off southern horizon. Steep and narrow gullies at intervals give rock-studded access to the beach. Outside of the miniature forests in the hollows there is no tree-growth on the whole forty square miles of land, excepting the deep-shaded tangle of the Hither Wood on the far northwest, into which none makes his way except an occasional sportsman on a coon hunt.

Except for the lighthouse family at the eastern tip, the three life-saving stations with their attendant houses, and a little huddle of fisher-huts on a reach of the Sound, there were no habitants in the mid-September of 1902, the few summer cottagers having fled the sharpened air. All day long the pasturing sheep of the interior might rove without the alarm of a single human. Short of the prairies, a lonelier stretch of land would be difficult of discovery.

To Dick Colton, rising late with a thankful heart after a sleep unvexed of labelled bottles, this loneliness was a balm, provided only it proved to be loneliness for two. For, with an eagerness strange and disquieting to his straightforward and rather unsentimental soul, he longed to look again upon the girl whose eyes had met his when he staggered back from the clutching hands of death. And with that longing was mingled an amused curiosity to clear up the puzzle of the impetuous souvenir she had left him. Within himself he resolved to solve this problem at the first opportunity; but just at this moment the opportunity was receding.

Far and clear against the sky-line, he could see from his window two mounted figures. Miss Ravenden and her father were riding to Amagansett, to be gone, as he learned later with disgust, all day. Helga Johnston had gone up to the lighthouse to stay until the following morning, and Haynes was working on his investigation of Petersen's death.

Nothing was left for the lone guest except to amuse himself as best he might.

The morning he spent in wandering meditation. Leisure for thought is a quick developer of certain processes. The Ravendens were to be at Third House for the month, he understood. One might get very well acquainted in a month, under favourable circumstances. At present the immediate circumstances were far from favourable. But Dick slapped the pocketbook to which he had transferred his keepsake from Miss Ravenden.

"That'll break *some* ice, I guess," he observed.

At dinner he contemplated a vacant place with an expression of such unhappiness that old Johnston took pity on him.

"The white perch'll likely be risin' in the lake yonder this evening," he said.

Here was antidote for any bane. Dick took his rod and went. The fish nobly fulfilled Johnston's word of them, and Dick had just landed a handsome one, when glancing up he saw a net moving along the line of a small ridge.

"The bug-hunter," he surmised.

"Oh, Professor Ravenden!" he called; and was instantly stricken with the dilemma: "What the dickens shall I say to him? "

The net paused, half-revolved and ascended, and Dick gasped as not Professor Ravenden, but his daughter, mounted the ridge.

"Did you want my father?" she asked.

"Oh--er--ah, good-evening, Miss Ravenden," stammered Colton. "I--I--I've been wanting to see you."

"There is some mistake," said she coldly. "I don't know who you are."

"My name is Colton," he said. "I'm staying at Third House, and ----"

"Does the mere fact of your staying at the same hotel give you the privilege of forcing your acquaintance upon people?" she asked sharply.

Then--for Dick Colton was good for the eye of woman to look upon, and not at all the sort of man in appearance to force a vulgar flirtation--she added:

"I don't want to be unpleasant about it, but really, don't you think you take things a little too much for granted?"

"But you spoke to me first," blurted out Dick. "I'm awfully sorry to have you think me rude, but I want to know what this is."

Curiosity drew Dorothy Ravenden as powerfully as it commonly draws less imperious natures.

Somewhat peculiar this man might be, but it seemed a harmless aberration, and it certainly took an interesting guise. She bent forward to look at the object extended to her.

"Why, it's a twenty-dollar bill!"

"Then my eye-sight is still good," he observed contentedly. "Question number two: Why did you give it to me?"

"To you?" To Dick Colton, as she stood there poised, the gracious colour flushing up into her cheeks, her lips half-opened, she was the loveliest thing he ever had seen. The hand that held the bill shook. "To you?" she repeated. "I didn't."

"It was just like an operatic setting," he expounded slowly. "Background of cliffs, firelight in the middle, ocean surf in front. Out of the magic circle of fire steps the Fairy Queen and hands to the poor but deserving toiler what in common parlance is known as a double saw-buck. Please, your Majesty, why? And do you want a receipt?"

"Oh!" she said in charming dismay. And again "Oh!" Then it came out: "I took you for one of the life-savers."

"The life-savers?" repeated Dick.

"Yes. Is that strange? You were so big and shaggy and --" she stopped short of the word "splendid" which was on her lips. "How could I tell? You looked as much like a seal as a man."

The ripple of her laughter, full of joyousness, yet with a little catch of some underlying feeling in it, was a patent of fellowship, which would have astonished most of Miss Ravenden's hundreds of admirers, among whom she was regarded as a rather haughty beauty. "I don't know many men who would have done it--or

could have done it," she added simply, and gave him her eyes, full.

Dick turned red. "Anyone would have," he said. "It was the only thing to do."

She nodded slowly as if an impression had been confirmed to her satisfaction.

"As for this," he continued, looking from her to the greenback, and striving to speak calmly, when his heart was a-thrill with the desire to tell her how altogether lovely and lovable she was, "if it's intended as a reward of merit, I'll turn it over to Miss Johnston."

"Wasn't she magnificent?" cried the girl. "I'll slay Helga!" she added with a sudden change of tone. "She's a beast of the field. She knew about the--the bill and she never told me."

"That'll cost her just twenty dollars," declared Colton judicially, "because now I won't turn it over to her."

"Give it back to me, please," said the girl, holding out a tanned and slender hand.

"Give it back?" cried Colton in assumed chagrin. "Why, I already had spent that twenty in imagination."

"On what?" asked the girl rather impatiently.

"It's a long list," replied Colton cunningly. "You'd better sit down while I tell it over." He threw his coat over a rock, and she perched herself on it daintily.

"First, a hundred packages of plug tobacco. All coast-guards use plug, I believe. Then five dollars' worth of prints of prominent actors and actresses in gaudy colours. The rest in Mexican lottery tickets," he concluded lamely, his invention giving out.

"It wasn't worth sitting down for," she said disparagingly. "If you had intended to get something really useful, I might have let you keep it. Please!" The little hand went forth again.

Hastily he produced a ten-dollar bill and two fives. "You don't mind having it in change?" he said anxiously. "You see, this is the first money I ever earned outside of my profession, and I mean to frame it."

"If twenty dollars means so little to you that you can have it hanging around framed --"

"This particular twenty means a great deal to me," he interrupted.

She rose. "I was going down to try a cast or two," she said.

"With a net?" asked Dick. "I should like to see that."

"There's a fishing rod in the handle of the net," she explained, ignoring the hint. "I keep the net rigged because I help my father collect. Entomology is his specialty, and there are a few rare moths here that he hopes to get."

"Am I sufficiently introduced now to ask if I may walk along with you?"

"I'm sorry I was so--so snippy," she said sweetly. "To make up for it, you may."

"Are you here particularly for collecting moths?" he asked, stepping to her side.

"Yes, one or two kinds that my father and I are studying. I play butterfly in the winter and hunt them in the

summer. Everyone here has a purpose. Father and I are adding to the sum of human knowledge on *Lepidoptera*. Mr. Haynes is spending his vacation with Helga. Helga is resting, before taking up her musical studies. You ought to have a purpose. What has brought you here?"

Now, Dick Colton, like many big men, was awkward, and like most awkward men, was shy about women. Therefore, it was with a sort of stunned amazement and admiration for his own audacity that he found himself looking straight into Dorothy Ravenden's unfathomable eyes as he replied briefly:

"Fate."

"Well, upon my soul!" gasped that much-habituated young woman of the world, surprised for a brief instant out of her poise. Quickly recovering, she added: "A fortunate fate for Helga, surely. Except for you, she and Mr. Haynes must have been drowned."

"You knew her before, didn't you?"

"Yes; we visit at the same house in Philadelphia, and father and I have been coming down here for several years. I know her well. If I were a man, I should go the world over for Helga Johnston."

"She and Haynes are engaged, are they not?"

"No, not engaged," said the girl. "She is everything in the world to Mr. Haynes; but she isn't in love with him. He has never tried to make her. There is some reason; I don't know what. Sometimes I think he doesn't care for her in that way either. Or perhaps he doesn't realise it."

"Surely she seems fond of him."

"She is devoted to him. Why shouldn't she be? He has done everything for her."

"How happens that?"

"It's the kind of story that makes you love your kind," said the girl dreamily. "When Mr. Haynes first came here he was a young reporter with a small income, and Helga was a child of twelve with an eager mind and the promise of a lovely voice. He gave her books and got the Johnstons to send her to a good school. Then as she grew up and he came to be 'star man' (I think they call it) on his paper, he went to the Johnstons, who had come to know him well, and asked them to let him send Helga to preparatory school and then to college. It was agreed that she was not to know of the money that he put in their hands, and she never would have known except for something that happened in her freshman year. She held her tongue to save a classmate. They were going to expel her, when Mr. Haynes got wind of it, took the first train, ferreted out the truth, and went to the president.

"'Here are the facts,' he said. 'I'll leave them for you to act on, or I'll take them with me for publication, as you decide.'

"The case was hushed up; but in the adjustment Helga found put about Mr. Haynes' part in her education. Now he is arranging for her musical education. He has no family, nor anyone dependent on him; all his interests in life are centred in her. And the best of it is that she is worthy of it."

"It must be a great deal to such a man to inspire such absolute trust in a woman as he has in her," said Colton after a pause. "'I knew he would come after me,' she said when I asked her how she dared take so desperate a chance."

Miss Ravenden nodded at him appreciatively. "Yes; you see it too," she said. "You did something worth while when you saved those two. But what about your Portuguese? Do you really think he had anything to do with killing that poor sailor? Helga told me about it. What an extraordinary case it is!"

"What puzzles Haynes with his trained mind is surely too much for me," said Colton. "It seems that the man--great heaven! What was that?"

From the direction of the beach came a long-drawn, dreadful scream of agony, unhuman, yet with something of an appeal in it, too. The pair turned blanched faces toward each other.

"I must go over there at once," said Colton. "Someone is in trouble. Miss Ravenden, can you make your way to the house alone?"

The girl's small, rounded chin went up and outward. "I shall go with you," she said.

"You must not. There's no telling what may have happened. Please!"

With a swift, deft movement she parted the heavy handle of her net-stock, disclosing an ingeniously set revolver, which she pressed into his hand.

"I'm going with you," she repeated, with the most alluring obstinacy.

"Come, then," said Colton, and her pulses stirred to the tone. He caught her by the hand, and they ran, reaching the cliff-top breathless.

Barely discernible, on the sand, a quarter of a mile cast of Graveyard Point where the wreck had struck, was a dark body. They hurried down into the ravine and out of it, Colton in advance. Suddenly he burst into a laugh of nervous relief.

"It's a dead sheep," he said. "I thought it was a man."

He bent over it and his jaw dropped. "Look at that!" he cried.

Across the back of the animal's neck, half-severing it from the head, was a great gash, still bleeding slightly. They peered out into the dusk. As far as the eye could see, nothing moved along the sand.

Chapter Six

Helga

Galloping easily, an early riser may come from Montauk Light over to Third House in time for breakfast. Helga was an early riser and a skilled horsewoman. Flushed like the dawn, she came bursting into the living-room upon Dick Colton who, his mind being absent on another engagement, had forgotten to wind his watch when he went to bed the evening previous, and consequently had risen, on suspicion, one hour too early.

"I haven't had a chance to speak to you since the wreck," she said, giving him her firm young hand. "Are you any the worse for the rough usage our ocean gave you? And how can I half thank you for your courage?"

"Don't try," said Dick uncomfortably. "And don't talk to me about courage," he added. "I wish I could tell you how I choked all up with three cheers when you went in after that fellow."

"Oh," said the girl quietly, "we Montauk folk are bred to that sort of thing. Besides, I only paid a debt."

"A debt? To that Portuguese?"

"No, indeed! I never set eyes on the poor man before. It's just one of our local proverbs. Our fisher people here have a saying that those who are rescued from the sea can never find their heart's happiness until they have evened the tally by saving a life."

"Then you've had your own shipwreck adventure?" asked Dick.

"Twenty years ago I was washed to shore in just such a storm. Father Johnston was nearly killed, getting me. The only name I could tell them was Helga. They adopted me. Ah, they have been good to me, they and Petit Père."

"Haynes? He's a full-size man!" declared Colton warmly. "'Save Helga!' he called to me, when he saw me floundering in."

"Yes, I knew he would come after me," said the girl simply; "but I didn't know you would come after him. So there's the chain," she added gaily. "I went in to clear off my debt and win my heart's happiness--though I do hope it isn't the Portuguese man. Petit Père went in to get me. And you," she paused and looked him between the eyes, "I think you came after us because you couldn't help it; because that is the sort of man you are. Why," she cried with a ring of laughter, "you're actually blushing!"

"I'm not used to the praises of full-blown heroines," retorted Dick. "I wondered what you meant when you said that the children of the sea dream the sea's dreams?"

"As for the dreams," began Helga. She did not conclude the sentence, but said gravely, "Yes, I'm a true sea-waif."

"I'd like to adopt you for a sister," said Dick, smiling, but with such an honesty of admiration that it was the girl's turn to blush.

"Haven't you any of your own?" she asked.

"'I am all the sisters of my father's house,'" he misquoted cheerily.

"And all the brothers too?" she capped the perversion.

"No; I've a brother a year younger than I. There may be in this universe," he continued reflectively, "people who don't like Everard. If there are, they live in Mars. Everybody on this old earth--and he seems to know pretty much all of 'em--takes to him like a duck to water. He's a wonder, that youth!"

"Everard?" said the girl. There was a quick and subtle change in her tone. "Is Everard Colton your brother? I should never have guessed it. You don't resemble each other in the least."

"No; he's the ornament of the family. I'm the plodder. And we're the greatest chums ever. Where did you know him?"

"Oh, he used to ride over to Bryn Mawr while I was at college," she said carelessly, "in an abominable yellow automobile and kill the gardener's chickens on an average of one a trip. The girls called his machine 'The Feathered Juggernaut.'"

"Bryn Mawr?" exclaimed Dick. "What an idiot I am! You're the Helga Johnston that--" He broke off short and regarded his feet with a colour so vividly growing as to suggest that they had suddenly occasioned him an agony of shame.

"Yes, I'm the girl that so alarmed your family lest I should marry your brother," she said calmly. "You need not have feared. I have not."

"Don't say 'you'!" interrupted Colton. "Please don't! I had no part in that. I hadn't the faintest idea who the girl was, but when I saw how Ev steadied down and settled to work I knew it was a good influence, and I told the family so. Now that I've met you--" he broke off suddenly. "Poor Ev!" he said in a low tone.

Had his boots been less demanding of attention, Colton would have seen the deep blue of her eyes dimmed to grey by a sudden rush of tears.

"Let us agree to leave your brother out of future conversations, Dr. Colton," she said decisively.
"Good-morning, Petit Père," she greeted Haynes as he came into the room.

"I salute you, Princess," said Haynes with a low bow. "You beat me in."

"Have you been out trying to gather more evidence against my poor juggler?"

"If I have, it's been with no success."

"I wish you failure," she returned as she left the room.

"Here's something that may interest you," said Colton to Haynes, and related the episode of the sheep.

The reporter sat down. Colton thought he looked white and worn. Haynes meditated, frowning.

"You say the sheep lay on the hard sand?" he said at length.

"Yes; halfway between the cliff-line and the ocean."

"That ought to help a lot," said Haynes decisively. "What marks were around it?"

"Marks?" repeated Colton vacantly.

"Yes; marks, footmarks," impatiently.

"Why, the fact is, I don't know what I could have been thinking of, but I didn't look."

"The Lord forgive you!"

"I'll go back now and find them."

"An elephant's spoor wouldn't have survived half an hour of the rain we had last night," Haynes said with evident exasperation.

"Miss Ravenden might have noticed something," suggested Colton hopefully.

On the word Haynes was out in the hallway, up the stairs, and knocking at the girl's door.

"Oh, Miss Dolly!" he called. "I want your help."

"What can I do for the great Dupin, Jr.?" asked the girl, coming out into the hall.

"Show that you've profited by his learned instructions. Did you see any marks on the sand around the dead sheep?"

"I'm an idiot!" said the girl contritely. "I never thought to look."

"It's well that your eyes are ornamental; they're not always useful," said Haynes in accents of raillery which did not conceal his disappointment.

"What have the great Dupin, Jr.'s eyes discovered to-day?" she asked.

"Nothing. You and Colton have provided an unsatisfactory ending to an unsatisfactory day. I've been talking with the survivors of the wreck and couldn't get any light at all. They've all left except 'the Wonderful Whalley.' He's pretty badly bruised, and anyway he won't go before paying his respects to Helga."

"I should think not, indeed!" said Miss Ravenden. "And to you."

"It's a curious thing, but he doesn't seem to be inspired by that devotion to me which my highly attractive character would seem to warrant. In fact he looks at me as if he would like to stick me with one of those particularly long, lean and unprepossessing knives which he cherishes so fondly."

"You don't really think," said Miss Ravenden in concern, "that there is any----"

"Figure of speech," interrupted Haynes. "But the man certainly isn't normal. I'll have to trace his movements of yesterday evening. First, however, I'll have a look at that sheep."

"Surely the Portuguese had nothing to do with that? Why should he kill a harmless animal?"

"There is such a thing as murderous mania," said Haynes after some hesitation.

Here Professor Ravenden entered. "I had rather a strange experience yesterday evening," he said.

"Did you hear the sheep too?" asked Colton eagerly.

"Not unless sheep fly, sir. What it was I heard I should be glad to have explained. To liken it to a rasping hinge of great size would hardly give a proper idea of its animate quality; yet I can find no better simile. Were any of the local inhabitants given to nocturnal aeronautics, however, I should unhesitatingly aver that they had passed close over me not half an hour since, and that their machinery needed oiling."

"I have heard such a noise," said Haynes quietly. "Did it affect you unpleasantly?"

"No, sir. I cannot say it did. But it roused my interest. I shall make a point of pursuing it further."

"Miss Johnston is calling us to breakfast," said Colton.

"I'm just going to take a quick jump to the beach and a glimpse at the sheep," said Haynes, and a moment later they saw him passing on his horse.

From her place at the head of the breakfast-table Helga Johnston called Dr. Colton to sit next to her, and while talking to him kept one eye on the door. Presently in came Miss Ravenden.

"Come up to this end, Dolly," called Helga. "I want to introduce to you our new guest. Dr. Colton, Miss Ravenden."

"Dr. Colton and I already have--" began Dorothy.

"I was fortunate enough to find Miss Ravenden--" said the confused Dick in the same breath.

"Dr. Colton," continued Helga, cutting them both off, "is here making a collection of government paper currency. I mention this because Miss Ravenden has a well-known reputation for discerning contributions "

"Helga," said Miss Ravenden calmly, "I have a few withering remarks waiting for you. Dr. Colton, you probably didn't know that you were saving a practical joker when you--"

"Earned that twenty-dollar bill," put in Helga. "But how did you two adjust your financial relations?"

To Dick's relief the outer door opened, admitting Haynes. They turned to him instantly, with questioning faces.

With the change of voice which he kept for Helga alone, he said: "Princess, another of your courtiers is coming over this evening to display his talents."

"Who, Petit Père?"

"Your juggler, 'The Wonderful Whalley.'"

"Did you find out anything about him, Monsieur Dupin?" asked Miss Ravenden.

"Nothing worth while. If he was out last night, no one knows it."

"And the dead sheep?"

But Haynes only shook his head and attacked his breakfast.

After breakfast the party separated, Haynes riding over to see some of the fishermen, Helga busying herself with household affairs, Miss Ravenden joining her father in a butterfly expedition to the Hither Wood, and

Colton going off alone in ill-humour after a signal discomfiture.

He had endeavoured to convince Miss Ravenden that he cherished a passionate fondness for entomology, hoping thereby to gain an invitation to join the party. Unfortunately he undertook the role of a semi-expert, and being by nature the most honest and open of men had fallen into the pit she dug. Upon his profession of faith she at once, so he flattered himself, accepted him as a fellow enthusiast, and began to describe to him a procession of *Arachnidae* across a swamp.

"In the lead was one great, tiger-striped fellow," she said. "Are you familiar with the beautiful, big arachnid with the yellow-and-black wings?"

"Yes, indeed!" said Colton eagerly. "I used to see 'em flitting around the roses at our summer place."

"Then," she said mischievously, "you ought to alter your habits. The *arachnids* are spiders. Anyone who sees winged spiders is safer fishing than on a butterfly hunt. Good-bye, Dr. Colton."

Chapter Seven

The Wonderful Whalley

Thus cruelly disabused of his hopes, Dick Colton went fishing. But his heart was not in the sport. Absent-mindedly he made up a cast of flies and spent an hour of fruitless whipping before it dawned upon him that he had been using a scarlet ibis and a white miller in a blaze of direct sunshine. Having changed to a carefully prepared leader of grey and black hackles, he had better luck; but for the first time in his life successful angling had lost its savour. Laying aside his rod, he climbed a hillock to look over the landscape. It was a blank. Nowhere in the range of vision could he discern a butterfly net. The rock where he had spread his coat suggested a seat. He sat down there, and for one solid hour proved with irrefutable logic that that which was, couldn't possibly be so, because he had known Dolly Ravenden only two days. Having attained this satisfactory conclusion, he took out the twenty-dollar bill and regarded it with miserly fervour. Haynes, coming over the hill, caused a hasty withdrawal of currency.

The reporter seemed tired and worried. In answer to the physician's inquiry whether anything new had developed, he shook his head. Colton dismissed that subject, and with his accustomed straightforwardness went on to another, upon which he had been deliberating with an uneasy mind.

"Mr. Haynes," he said, "I want to speak to you on rather a difficult subject."

The reporter looked at him keenly. "Most difficult subjects are better let alone," he said shortly.

"In fairness to you I can't let this one alone. It concerns Miss Johnston."

"Whom you have known since Monday, I believe." Haynes' face was disagreeable.

"Pardon me," said the other. "My interest is in my brother."

"I can't pretend to share it," returned Haynes.

"His name is Everard Colton. Do you know him?"

"Perhaps when I tell you that I know something of your family's entirely unnecessary solicitude as to Miss Johnston, you will appreciate the bad taste of pursuing the subject," said Haynes.

Dick's equable temper and habituated self-control stood him in good stead now.

"I am regarding you as standing in the place of Helga Johnston's brother," he said.

"Are you appealing to me for help in your family affairs?" asked the reporter rather contemptuously.

"I am trying to be as frank with you as I should like you to be with me," returned the other steadily. "I want your consent to my sending for Everard to come down here."

Haynes stared at him, amazed. "What do you mean by that?"

"Exactly what I say. There have been some hotheaded and unfortunate judgments on the part of my family, which report has greatly magnified. I realise now the full extent of the error."

"And what has brought about this change of heart?" sneered the other.

"My acquaintance with Miss Johnston. There are some women who carry the impress of fineness and of character in their faces and their smallest actions. Even if I had learned nothing else about her, after seeing Helga Johnston I would think it an honour for any family to welcome her."

Haynes' face softened, but it still was with some harshness that he said: "There are other Coltons who think otherwise."

"That is because they don't know," was the quick reply. "I want Everard to have his chance, and I've put this case before you because I know and respect your relation to Miss Johnston, and because I believe it is your right."

"Yes, you're fair about it," said Haynes, and fell into deep thought.

"Of course," said Dick uneasily, "if having Everard here is going to be--er--painful to you, I won't ask him. I should have thought of that first. I don't know that Everard would have a chance anyway."

"Dr. Colton, I believe that Helga did care for your brother."

"But is it an open field?" asked Dick impulsively.

A slight smile appeared on Haynes' lined face. "You mean, do I want to marry Helga myself? She has never thought of me in that way. In a way it would be painful, yet I should be glad to know, while I have time, that she was going to marry some good man--but not any man whose family could not accept her as she deserves."

"While you have time," said the young physician slowly. "While you have--" He broke off, advanced a step and peered into the other's face. Haynes bore the scrutiny with a grim calmness.

As Colton scrutinised, the harsh lines that he had translated into irritable temperament leaped forth into the terrible significance of long-repressed pain.

"I don't want to be professionally intrusive," said the young doctor slowly, "but I think--I'm afraid--I know what you mean."

"Ah, I see you are something of a diagnostician," said Haynes quietly.

"How long has it been going on?"

"Nearly a year. It's just behind the left armpit. Rather an unusual case, I believe. You see, I'm not on the lists as a marrying man."

Colton walked to and fro on the little level stretch, half a dozen times. He had seen sickness and suffering in its most helpless forms; but this calm acceptance of fate affected him beyond his professional bearing.

"Do your people know?"

"I have no people. It hasn't seemed worth while to mention it to my friends. So you will regard this as a professional confidence?"

"Oh, look here!" burst out Colton. "I can't sit around and watch this go on. I've got more money than I can rightly use. You don't know me much, and you don't like me much, but try to put that aside. Let me pay your--" he glanced at Haynes and swiftly amended--"let me lend you enough to take you abroad for a year. I'll write to some people in Vienna and Berlin. They're away ahead of us in cancerous affections. I'd go with you,

only--" he stopped short, as he realised that the controverting reason was Miss Dorothy Ravenden's presence on the American side of the ocean.

The reporter walked over and put his hand on Colton's shoulder. His harsh voice softened to something of the tone that he used toward Helga, as he said: "My dear Colton, all the money in the world won't do it. If it would, well," with a sudden, rare smile, "I'm not sure I wouldn't take yours, provided I needed it."

"Try it," urged the other. "You don't know how much those foreign experts may help you."

Haynes shook his head. "*O, terque quaterque beati, queis ante ora patrum contigit oppetere*," he quoted. "That's one of my few remnants of Virgil. It means a great deal to me. I shall not die in exile. Well, Colton, send for your brother."

"And what will you do?"

"Stay here and work. There's something in life besides pain when inexplicable strokes from the void kill men and sheep. I'm going over to do some more investigating."

"And I to wire my brother," said Colton.

"Don't forget that 'The Wonderful Whalley' is to give his exhibition this evening."

They met at dinner, and before they had finished the juggler was announced. The whole party joined him outside, where he had been arranging his simple paraphernalia. Running to Helga, he dropped on his knee in exaggerated and theatrical courtliness.

"Mademoiselle, I am your adoring slave for always," he said, lifting his brilliant, unsteady eyes to her for a moment. "Weeth your kind permission I exheebit my powers."

He led them to the barnyard, where there was a favourable open space, and began with some simple acrobatics. His audience was Mr. and Mrs. Johnston, Helga, Haynes, Colton, and the servants. Professor Ravenden and his daughter had not returned. After the acrobatics came sleight-of-hand with cards and handkerchiefs.

"Now I show you ze real genius," said the performer.

From his belt he drew the two heavy blades which had so interested Haynes. These he supplemented with smaller knives, until he held half a dozen in hand. Facing the great barn door, he dexterously slanted a card into the air. As it rose he poised one of the smaller knives. Down came the card, paralleling the surface of the door. Swish! The knife shot through the air and nailed the card to the wood. Another card flew. Thud! It was pinned fast. A third, less accurately reckoned, fluttered by one corner.

"Now, ze ace of hearts!" cried the juggler. "We shall face it."

Forward he flipped it. It turned in air, showing the central spot. It struck the door at a slight angle and was about turning when the knife met it. Straight through the single heart passed the blade. "The Wonderful Whalley" struck an attitude.

"Well, by Jove!" exclaimed Colton. "I've seen knife-play in Mexico by the best of the Greasers, but nothing like this."

"Zere is no one like 'Ze Wonderful Whalley,'" declared that artist coolly, as he gathered his knives, all except

the one that held the ace of hearts. He stepped back. "You look at ze spot," he added, addressing Haynes.

Haynes moved forward to draw out the blade.

There was a cry from Helga and Colton. Something struck the wood so close to his ear that he felt the wind of it, and the handle of one of the big blades quivered against his cheek.

"Eet is for warning," said "The Wonderful Whalley" urbanely. "Ze heart, eet could--"

He choked as the powerful grasp of Johnston closed on his throat. Haynes and Colton ran forward; but there was no need. The man was passive.

"Eeet was onlee a trick," he said. "I am insult. I go home."

"Shall we let him go?" said Haynes undecidedly.

The question was settled for them. With a sudden blow, the juggler knocked down Johnston, dodged between Haynes and Colton, caught his knife from the door as he ran with great swiftness, and threatening back pursuit at the ready point, disappeared not toward the Sand Spit station, but straight over the hills. The baffled captors looked at each other in dismay.

"We've got a loose wild animal to deal with now," said Colton.

Chapter Eight

The Unhorsed Nightfarer

Around the big fireplace with its decorations of blue-and-white Colonial china, which many a guest by vast but vain inducements had tried to buy from the little hostelry, sat Dick Colton, Haynes and old Johnston. The clock had struck nine some minutes earlier.

"Your brother couldn't have caught the afternoon train," remarked Haynes. "Was he to ride over?"

"Yes, I arranged for a saddle-horse to meet him at Amagansett," answered Colton.

"Reckon the Professor and Miss Dolly stopped at the fishermen's for dinner," opined the old man, as a soft and sudden breeze stirred the curtains. "If they ain't in pretty quick they'll get wet. There's somebody now!"

A tramp of feet clumped on the porch, the door was thrown open and a young man limped in. He was tall, almost as tall as Dick Colton, but much slenderer, and extremely dark. Despite his unsteady gait, he bore himself with an inimitably buoyant and jocund carriage. His well-made riding-suit was muddied and torn, his head was bare, and from a long but shallow cut on his forehead blood had trickled down one side of his handsome face, giving him an appearance of almost theatrical rakishness.

"Hello, Dick, old man!" he cried. "How goes the quest for slumber?"

"Good Lord, Ev!" responded Dick Colton, hurrying to meet him. "What's the matter with you? Are you hurt?"

Keenly watching the greeting, Haynes noted the evident and open affection between the two brothers.

"Just a twisted knee," said the younger. "Thrown, Dick--thrown like a riding-school novice. I'd hate to have it get back to the troop."

"It must have been something extraordinary to get you out of the saddle," said Dick, for Everard Colton was one of the best of the younger polo men.

"It was extraordinary enough, all right," acquiesced the younger man, "Let me clean up and I'll tell you about it."

"Wait a moment," said Dick Colton, and introduced his brother to the other men. "Several queer things have been happening here lately," he continued. "We're all interested in them, particularly Mr. Haynes. Tell us now--unless you're in pain," added Dick anxiously. "Let's look at your knee."

"Oh, that's nothing. I'm not suffering any except in my temper. Things I don't understand disturb my judicial poise."

"Did your horse roll into one of the gullies?" asked Haynes. "There are some nasty slides if you get off the road."

"No, my horse didn't; but I did," replied the other. "The Professor of Prevarication who keeps the Amagansett livery stable told me that the mare knew the road. If she did know it, she carefully concealed her knowledge, for as soon as the pitch darkness fell (by the way, I don't remember a blacker night) she began to stroll across the verdant meads like a man chewing a straw and thinking of his troubles. Except for the sound of the surf, I had no way to steer her, so I just said to her: 'If you lug me back to Amagansett, I'll break every rib in your umbrella,' and let her amble. About half an hour ago I sighted your light here. Without any cause that I could

make out, my lady friend began to toss her head upward and sniff the air and tremble."

"You think the horse heard something?" asked Haynes.

"If I'd been in a big game country I should have said she scented something. It was a dead calm, and I could have heard any noise, I think. Well, Jezebel began to buck-jump, and I was rather enjoying myself when suddenly she did a thing that was new to me in the equine line. Her legs just seemed to give way from under her, and she slumped so completely that I was flipped off sidewise. As I got to my feet I felt a little gust of air that brought a curious odour very plainly to me."

"That's a new development," said Haynes quietly. "What was it like?"

"Did you ever smell a copperhead snake?"

"Often. Like ripe cucumbers."

"Yes. Well, this was something on that order, only much stronger and pretty sickening. Are there any copperheads in Montauk?"

"No, nor ever was," said Johnston positively.

"Anyway, I think it was a snake. The mare thought it was something uncanny. She went crazy, and began to rave and tear like a bucking automobile. Just as I thought I was getting her calmed I stepped on a round stone, that slid me down into a gully on one side of my face. Again I felt that strange rush of foul air. Jezebel gave a yell and broke away, and I was adrift on the broad prairies. There's one thing I noticed--oh, well, I suppose I imagined it."

"No. Go on. Tell us what it was."

"Well, the draft of wind seemed to come from opposite directions. It seemed as if something had passed and repassed above me."

Dick Colton turned to Haynes. "'The Wonderful Whalley' is somewhere on the knolls," he said.

"Yes; but he isn't flying around in the air on a broomstick."

"One could almost believe he had other attributes of the vampire besides the blood-thirst," replied Colton. "Ev, Mr. Johnston will show you your room. Come down when you're ready. I've got something to look after."

"You're worried about Miss--about the Ravendens," said Haynes to Dick as the junior Colton left the room. "Wait a moment, till I get lanterns. I'm going with you."

"Thank you," said Dick quietly. "I thought you would. Ev won't like it much when he finds there's something afoot and he has been left out."

"He's had his share. I've an idea that your brother has been near to death to-night."

"The more reason for haste, then."

"I'll strike off inland. You take the sea side," said Haynes, as the two lighted lanterns and passed out into the dead blackness. "And, by the way," he added, "I wouldn't make my light any more conspicuous than

necessary."

"All right," said Dick. "I've no particular desire to attract Whalley's attention."

Within ten minutes the young doctor heard voices, and called. Professor Ravenden's dry accents answered him. With a hail to Haynes, Colton ran forward. He almost plunged into Dolly Ravenden's horse, which reared and snorted.

"What is it?" cried the girl. "Oh, it's Dr. Colton. Are you hunting the night-flying *arachnida*?"

"I was looking for you."

"Has anything happened? " asked the girl quickly, sobered by his tone. "Helga? Mr. Haynes?"

"No, all are safe." He laid his hand on the neck of her mount. "But you must come home at once. There is danger abroad."

"Why, Dr. Colton, you're trembling! I wouldn't have believed you knew what it was to be afraid."

"You don't know what it is to care--" he cut off the words with something like a sob. "Thank God, we found you!"

Then the girl had cause to bless the darkness, for from her heart there surged a flood to her face, and with it woman's first doubt and fear and glory. "Perhaps I do know," she thought. For an instant, she closed her eyes and saw him as he had come draggled and staggering from the sea. She opened them upon his stalwart figure and the clean-cut, manly face, still drawn with anxiety, clear in the light of the lantern.

"It was good of you to brave the danger," she said sweetly. "I have had a premonition of some tragedy overhanging, since we found the sheep."

"Well, Professor! Hello, Miss Dolly!" called Haynes, as he swung up on a trot. "Are you all right? Better hurry in. There's a storm coming."

"It is something besides a storm that brought you gentlemen out on a search for us," said Professor Ravenden shrewdly. "While properly appreciative, I should be glad to have an explanation."

The explanation came swiftly, from the direction of the sea. It was a long-drawn, high-pitched scream. There was in it a cadence of mortal terror; the last agony rang shrill and unmistakable from its quivering echoes. Miss Ravenden's horse bounded in the air; but Colton's weight on the bridle brought it down shaking.

"That was a horse," said the girl tremulously. "Poor thing!"

"In dire extremity, if I mistake not," added the professor. "I am beginning to feel an interest which I trust is not unscientific in this succession of phenomena."

"I think," said Haynes quickly, "that the house is the place for us just now. That's the end of your brother's horse," he added to Colton in a low tone.

When Dick Colton lifted the girl from her saddle at the front porch he said to her: "Miss Ravenden, may I ask you to promise me something?"

"I don't know," said the girl, in sudden apprehension. "What is it?"

"That you will not go out alone on the grassland again, nor go out even with your father after dusk, until Mr. Haynes or I tell you it is safe?"

"I promise. But won't you tell me what you have found out?"

"Something unhorsed my brother as he came across the point in the darkness, and that was his mare's death-cry you heard from the shore."

When they were inside, Haynes suggested that they hold a brief consultation, at which all should be present. Mr. and Mrs. Johnston, Helga and Everard Colton were sent for. In the stress of the moment Haynes had forgotten that Helga had not been warned of the younger Colton's coming. Everard came into the room first, and provided his brother with a surprise, by rushing at Miss Ravenden as if bent on devouring her.

"Little Dot, the butterfly's Nemesis!" he cried. "When did you get here, and how? And Professor too! Well, this is a lark!" To which greeting the Ravendens responded with equal warmth.

"Dick, you scoundrel, why didn't you tell me they were here?" cried Everard.

"I didn't know you knew them," returned the bewildered Dick.

"Know them? Why, I've spent a week of my latest vacation on their house-boat. The *Lepidopteræ* of half the Southern States shriek aloud when they see Miss Ravenden and me approaching. Besides, I'm useful, am I not, Dolly?"

"Not in terms that could be reduced to an estimate," said that young woman.

"Ungrateful maiden! Don't I shoo off your swarming adorers, comprising all the polyglot of Washington and most of the blue blood of Philadelphia? I'm the only man in America who can be with Miss Dorothy Ravenden for three consecutive days without falling desperately in love with her. I escape only because I know it's hopeless."

"Oh, is that it?" said Dolly demurely. "I had heard there was a more tangible reason for my bereavement. Vardy, you're looking serious in spite of all your nonsense. I believe, upon my soul, the stories are true."

"Oh, Dick," said Everard hastily, "I nearly forgot about that package of books. I dropped 'em outside. Here they are and they'll cost you just eight dollars and eighty cents and the price of a drink for my trouble in bringing them. Don't know what they are, because I turned over your telegram to Towney; but by their weight they're worth the money. Let's have a look at them."

Before Dick could protest he had opened the package.

"'Summer reading for a young physician,'" he began, looking at the titles. "What have we here? Harris' 'Insects Injurious to Vegetation'; 'The Butterfly Book,' by Holland; 'Special Report on the Spiders of Long Island'; 'North American' --well, by my proud ancestral halls!"

"Give me those books, Ev!" said Dick sharply.

"Little Everard, the Boy Wonder, has put a dainty foot in it again!" He laughed banteringly, looking from Dorothy Ravenden to Dick and back again. "Dick, too? Oh, Dolly, couldn't you leave the family alone for my sake? Case of 'Love me, love my bugs'!"

But even the much-allowanced Everard had gone too far. Dolly Ravenden turned upon him with an expression

which boded ill for the venturesome young man, when a volume of song from the hallway, that seemed, controlled and effortless as it was, to fill full and permeate every farthest nook and corner of the house, stopped her. It was Helga singing a quaint and stirring old ballad.

"Where there is no place

For the glow-worm to lie,

Where there is no space

For receipt of a fly;

Where the midge dare not venture

Lest herself fast she lay,

If Love come he will enter

And will find out the way."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Dick Colton. "What a voice! Who is it?"

"Haven't you heard Helga sing?" said Dolly Ravenden, in surprise. "Isn't it superb!"

Everard had risen and was looking hungrily toward the door. Dolly looked keenly at him, and saw in his face a look that she had seen in many a man's eyes, but that no woman but one had ever before seen in Everard Colton's.

"It is true," she said to herself. The voice went on:

"There is no striving

To cross his intent,

There is no contriving

His plots to prevent;

For if once the message greet him

That his true-love doth stay,

Though Death come forth to meet him,

Love will find out the way."

The soft, deep, triumphant final note died away. There was a moment's silence.

"Dick, you ought to have told me," said Everard, unsteadily.

But Dick paid no heed. He was looking at Haynes, upon whose cold and rather hard-lined face was such an expression of loving pride and yearning, as utterly transfigured it.

"I ought to be kicked for bringing Everard down here," thought the gentle-hearted young doctor.

The door opened and Helga entered. As if drawn magnetically, her gaze went straight to Everard Colton. She stopped short.

"Helga!" said he.

The girl caught her breath sharply. Her hand fluttered toward her breast, and fell again. Her colour faded; but instantly she was mistress of herself.

"Good-evening, Mr. Colton," she said quietly, and gave him her hand as she came forward. "Did you come in this evening? It always is wiser to write ahead for rooms."

"I don't understand," he stammered. "Are you--do you live here?"

"This is my father's hotel," she explained. "Father, this is Mr. Everard Colton. Is there a room for him?"

"I've found my room," said Everard hoarsely, and there followed a silence which Miss Ravenden maliciously enjoyed, her eyes sparkling at her erstwhile tormentor's discomfiture.

Haynes broke the silence. "This is all very pleasant," he said sharply and with an effort, "but it isn't business. And we have business of a rather serious nature on hand. There is just this to say: Somewhere on the point is this juggler. He is armed, and there is at least a strong suspicion that he is murderous. The death of the sailor, the killing of the sheep, and Mr. Colton's adventure show plainly enough that there is peril abroad. It may or may not have to do with the juggler. But until the man is captured, I think the ladies should not leave the house alone; and none of us should go far alone or unarmed. Is that agreed?"

"I agree for myself and my daughter to your very well-judged suggestion," said Professor Ravenden, "and I have in my room an extra revolver which I will gladly lend to anyone."

The others also assented to the plan, and at Haynes' suggestion the weapon went to Helga's adopted father. Dick Colton had a navy revolver, Everard had his cavalry arm, and Haynes had written for a pistol.

"Would it not be well," suggested the professor, "to notify the authorities?"

"The average town constable is appointed to keep him out of the imbecile asylum," said Haynes. "I believe we can organise a vigilance committee right here and see it through. Besides," he added with a smile, "I want the story exclusively for my paper."

Chapter Nine

Cross-Purposes

"Has the generalissimo been disobeying his own orders?" called out Dolly Ravenden from the porch, as Haynes came up the pathway early the next morning. He did not respond to the rallying tone, habitual between them, which covered a well-founded friendship. Instead he said:

"Miss Dolly, you heard that horse last night. What did you think of the cry?"

"It went through me like a knife," said the girl, shuddering. "I thought it was a death scream. The horse I was on thought so, too."

"I'd have sworn to it myself," said Haynes, and fell into deep thought.

"Well?" queried the girl after waiting impatiently. "It isn't a secret, is it?"

"Something in that line. I've just been all over the ground between the place where Mr. Colton was assailed and the beach, without finding hide or hair of the horse. It must have escaped."

"I for one won't believe that until I see it alive."

Haynes glanced at her sharply. "Woman's intuition," he said. "I won't either. Well, I'm going to breakfast."

The girl lingered, looking out into the ruddy-golden morning. It was late September weather, a day burnished with sunlight. A faint haze softened the splendour of the knolls. The air was instinct with the rare, fine quality of the vanishing summer. It was the falling cadence of the season, one of the last few perfect, fulfilling notes of the year's love melody. With all the knowledge that death and horror lurked somewhere in the lovely expanse spread before her, Dolly Ravenden yearned to it. Soon she would be back amid the cosmopolitan gaieties of the Capital. She loved that too, but with a different and shallower part of her nature. Sharply it came to her that this year she would leave with a deeper regret than ever before, and the nature of that regret was formulating itself against the stern veto of her will. "A man I've not seen half a dozen times!" she half incredulously reproached herself.

A certain feminine exasperation against herself was illogically and perversely turned upon Dick Colton as he strode around the corner of the piazza. The experienced wager of love-tilts might have interpreted the expression she turned to him, and have fled the stricken field. Poor Dick was the merest novice. His attitude toward women had always been much the same as toward men, varying in degree according to the charm or quality of the individual, but all of a kind, until he had encountered Dolly Ravenden. To his unsuspecting mind it seemed that at the present moment he was in the greatest luck. The sun was shining with a special, even a personal, lustre. Abruptly it darkened several million candle-power as Miss Ravenden gave him the most casual of greetings and the curve of a shoulder while she scanned the spreading landscape.

"Have I done anything, Miss Dol--Miss Ravenden?" asked blundering Dick.

"Done anything?" repeated she with indifferent inquiry. "I'm sure I don't know."

This fairly nonplussed him. He sat down and wondered what to do next. Unfortunately his thoughts turned upon his brother.

"Isn't it great that you know Ev?" he pursued. "I'm so glad that I sent for him to come down."

"You sent for him?" cried the girl in a tone that straightened up Dick like a pin.

"Certainly. Why not?"

"To see Helga, I suppose."

"Yes."

"Of course you assumed that she was dying to see him."

"Not in the least," said Dick, with some spirit. "Just to give him his fair chance."

"You didn't think of being fair toward anyone else?"

"Toward whom?"

"Miss Johnston herself, in the first place. One expects a certain degree of delicacy even from--from --"

"Don't smooth it down on my account," said Dick grimly. "You seem to be in a fairly frank mood to-day."

The imp of the perverse indeed was guiding Dolly's words now. "From a man one knows nothing whatever about," she concluded.

"And isn't interested in knowing," suggested he.

"I'm as fond of Helga as of my own sister," she went on vehemently. "She is only a year younger than I, but I've been about so much more that I--well, I assume some responsibility for her." Her tone challenged Dick. He merely bowed.

"You know how it is between Helga and your brother?"

"Something of it."

"And knowing, do you think it was right to bring him down here?"

"Why not?"

"Because," said Miss Ravenden hotly, "your family became panic-stricken at the thought of Everard's marrying Helga, before they even took the trouble to find out anything about her. To insult a woman whom they have never seen! Why--why--Helga is as--If I had a brother, and Helga Johnston was willing to marry him I should count it an honour to the Ravendens."

All the imperious pride of a family who had been landed gentry in the South, while Colton's sturdy forebears were wielding pick and shovel in the far West, who had signed the Declaration of Independence before the first American Colton had worked a toilsome passage across from his North Country hovel to the land of sudden riches, shone in her eyes.

"So should I!" returned Dick quietly. "But surely Helga Johnston did not tell you all this?"

"No, she did not. It was the same meddlesome friend who first told her of your family's objections. Oh, if I were Everard I would tell his family to--to --"

"To go to the devil," suggested Dick helpfully.

"Please not to put words into my mouth! Yes, I should!" she returned hotly. Then, illogically and severely added, "particularly such words. And after what I told you about Harris Haynes I should have thought that an ordinary sense of justice--Oh, it was unmanly of you!"

Dolly's imp now had spurred her into a respectable state of rage, and Dick's wrath rose to meet hers.

"Just a moment," he said. "What was that about Haynes?" Two wrinkled lines appeared between his eyes. His mouth altered in its set, giving to his naturally pleasant face an aspect of almost savage determination.

"Why," thought Dolly, "he's looking at me as if I wasn't a girl at all, but just something in his path to beat down." And her quick pang of alarm had something pleasurable in it.

"I want that again about Haynes."

"I say you were not fair to him. You know perfectly well that whatever chance Mr. Haynes may have with Helga--"

"Chance of what? Of marrying her?"

"Certainly," said Dolly boldly.

"Do you think she loves Haynes?"

"I don't know."

"You do know. You think that she doesn't. And do you think he loves her?"

"Why should I tell you, when you will only browbeat and contradict me? I know this, that there is the most beautiful affection between them that I have ever known between a man and a girl. With two people less fine than Helga and Harris Haynes it could not be so. You aren't capable of understanding that sort of thing. And so you would destroy this for the mere whim of a boy!"

"It is not the whim of a boy," returned Dick sternly. "It has made Everard a man. I think she loves him."

"What if she does?" said the girl recklessly.

"You mean you would have her marry Haynes without love?"

"Yes," said Dolly, too far committed to back down now; but within herself she was saying: "Oh, you wretched little liar!"

"Ah!" observed Dick with a change to cold courtesy that stung her more than his wrath. "I haven't had the good fortune to meet many girls so advanced in their views. Myself, both as a physician and unprofessionally, I am simple enough to think that loveless marriages are unfortunate."

"Oh, sentimentality has its place, I suppose," said the imp within Dolly.

"I think I understand you," he said with an effort.

"You don't! Oh, you don't!" cried Dolly's better spirit. "Don't dare to think of me so!" But the imp controlled

the lips with silence.

"Yes, I think I understand," continued Dick. "I have had little time for my social obligations; but I have seen enough to have met and been sickened by this before. That associations of what we call good society can have so corrupted the view of life in a girl like you--Oh, it seems incredible! Probably because it never happened to hit me personally before."

The girl went perfectly white under the bitterness of his contempt.

"There is nothing further to say, Dr. Colton," she said, rising. There were a thousand things to say; but the imp of the perverse would not let her say them. "You have only convinced me that for any woman to be connected with your family would be the direst misfortune."

When Dick found himself alone there was a blur over his mental vision such as extreme pain brings to the physical eye. The whole wretched scene repeated itself over and over. How readily he could have defended himself with Haynes' own words against the charge of unmanly treachery to Haynes! How easily he could have refuted!--but to what purpose, since she was unworthy? Hatless and aimless, he wandered out upon the grass-land.

Almost before he knew it he had reached the beach and was approaching Graveyard Point. Coming around a jut in the cliff he was amazed to see Professor Ravenden digging energetically at the sand with an improvised shovel. At once the professor hailed him for help. Now, the normal man, no matter how miserable his mood, will rouse to the solution of a mystery, and when Dick Colton saw the form of a horse partly revealed, he pitched in heartily.

"How did you find it?" he asked the professor.

"In passing I noticed that the cliff had given way above," was the reply. "As there had been no rain, some unusual occurrence must have caused this. Closer examination revealed the leg of a horse, upon which I inferred that here was buried the mare ridden by my young friend, your brother. Doubtless we soon shall perceive some clue as to the manner of death."

But the body being wholly uncovered revealed no wound.

"Must have run off the cliff in her flight," suggested Colton.

"An almost untenable hypothesis," said Professor Ravenden argumentatively. "The place where your brother was unhorsed is a mile from here, at least. We heard the animal's death-cry an hour after your brother's encounter. Could you devise any form of terror which would so afflict a horse as to drive it over a hundred-foot cliff, a full hour after the origin of the panic?"

"No, I couldn't. Whatever it was that terrified, the poor brute must have followed it. The juggler, I suppose."

"But for what purpose? However, I think we would best climb the cliff, and taking opposite directions examine the ground for any possible indications."

So the professor struck off westward, while Colton took the line toward the lighthouse. Soon his path led him down into one of the precipitous gullies. Inland from him a sharp turn shielded by large rocks cut off the view, beyond which appeared the upper foliage of a scrub-oak patch. From among the rocks Dick heard a strange sound, like a gasp.

His hand went to his revolver, and he stepped short. Again the sound came in a succession of cadences, like

interrupted breathing. Dick moved forward. A stone slipped under his foot and rattled down among other stones. There was instant silence.

Keeping himself sheltered, he walked firmly forward. Before a large rock he paused, then holding the weapon ready he stepped around it. Helga Johnston stood there, her hands pressed to her breast, her face tear-stained. She gave a little cry of relief.

"Ah, it is you!" she said.

"Did I frighten you?" asked Dick. "I'm awfully sorry. You've been crying."

"Yes," said the girl.

"Was it as bad as that? I must have alarmed you very much."

"No," said the girl with the simple directness which he had admired in her from the first. "I was frightened; but that was not why I was crying."

"Has Everard been with you?"

"Yes."

"Miss Helga," said Dick soberly, "will you believe that I am your friend?"

"I don't know," replied the girl dubiously. "Why did you bring your brother down here?"

"Do you remember, I said to you that I wished I had a sister like you? That is why."

Helga flushed deeply. "It was not fair," she said.

"Miss Johnston, is there any reason why you should not marry my brother?"

"Yes."

"Is it because some day you may marry Mr. Haynes?"

"There has never been the suggestion of such a thing. Why you and Dolly Ravenden both insist on believing that Petit Père wants to marry me, is--it's stupid!" said the girl indignantly.

"Ah! And Miss Ravenden has been advising you to marry Mr. Haynes?"

"She has been advising me not to," retorted Helga. "Harris Haynes is the best man I have ever known, and I owe him everything; but Dolly knows that I don't--really, Dr. Colton, I don't know why I should be telling you all these things."

Dick, thunderstruck at the new light on Miss Ravenden's views, paid no attention to this mild suggestion that he mind his own business. Indeed it suddenly had become his own business with a vengeance.

"Miss Ravenden advised you not to marry Haynes? It can't be. She told me --"

"You and Dolly seem to be very much interested in my affairs."

"I beg your pardon," said Dick. "Some day I hope to explain to you. Let us get back to Everard, You say there is a reason why you should not marry him?"

"Yes."

"Don't you care for him?"

"That is a question you have no right to ask."

"Ah!" said Dick with satisfaction. "Then it is that wretched business of the family's opposition."

Helga made no reply.

"Listen, Miss Helga," said Dick after a few moments' thought. "Someone told my mother lies about you. I don't know what they were; but I do know that they gave Mother a wrong impression. My mother is the best mother in the world, and a good and noble woman, only she has one attribute of the domestic hen. When alarmed she moves hurriedly, and usually in the wrong direction. The liar in this case alarmed her. Now, then: my father is a broken man; he has not long to live. I am virtually the head of the family. In this case the family will accept my decision. I ask you in their name if you will honour us by marrying my brother? Will you shake hands on the promise?"

He held out his hand, looking her in the eyes. Helga flushed deeply; but answered the smile with her own as she said:

"Dr. Colton, you are a good man, and"--she hesitated for a moment--" some girl will be very proud of you. But you aren't very wise about women, or you would know that there is only one man a girl can give that promise to. And," she added meaningly, "no one else can give it for her."

"I understand," he replied. "I say nothing."

"Then I'll shake hands on your promise," she said gravely.

"Well, well, well!" said a thick voice above them. "That's a nice picture. Whatcher think this is, Central Park? I'll tell that pup, Haynes."

Paul Serdholm, the life-guard from the Sand Spit station, stood on the brink of the ravine. It was evident that he had been drinking.

"You go about your business," said Colton slowly.

"Oh, that's easy said," retorted the fellow. "I'm on the trouble-hunt to-day. Went over to Bow Hill an' licked that shrimp Bruce for callin' me down the night of the wreck. Comin' back, I seen the Portuguese sneakin' along by an oak patch; so I dropped on him an' punched his face up. I don't like Dagoes. Now I'm going to do you up, you fresh guy."

"Serdholm, you're drunk," said Helga contemptuously. "And you're making a fool of yourself."

"An you'll report me at the station, hey? Just becuz you was washed ashore here you think you own Montauk! Well, report an' be--!"

"That will do!" said Colton.

"Will it? Come up here and make it!" taunted Serdholm. "No? All right, I'll come down."

Colton met him halfway. It was no fight; for though Serdholm was brawny the young physician was as greatly his superior in strength as in science and condition. The coast-guard rolled to the bottom of the gully and lay there cursing feebly.

"He will lose his place for this," said Helga as they went shoreward. "I hope he will, the beast!"

"Do you suppose he really thrashed the juggler, or was that only boasting?"

"He has the reputation of being quarrelsome when he has been drinking," said Helga.

"Haynes ought to know about it, then."

"I'll tell him. But, please, Dr. Colton, say nothing about Serdholm's rudeness. It would only make Petit Père angry, and cause trouble, and I've felt some danger overhanging him. Dr. Colton, do you believe in dreams?"

"We men whose business it is to deal with the human body, get to realise how much of mystery there is in the human soul," said Dick. "Is that an answer?"

"I don't know," replied the girl doubtfully. "Some day, perhaps, I shall tell you. Meantime," she added, as they approached Third House, "you won't forget your promise, will you?"

"No."

"As you've been interesting yourself in my affairs a good deal," said the girl with friendly raillery, "I'll just give you a bit of free advice. Don't take everything about Dolly Ravenden too seriously. She's had loads of attention and seen a great deal of the world, and she is pretty high-spirited; but she is in every way a splendid girl and a right-minded one. I imagine she is not always easy to understand."

"Heaven knows I've made one awful blunder! " groaned Dick.

"Then don't apologise for it too soon," said the girl quickly. "There, I've been a traitor to my sex. But I like you, Dick Colton. And," she added as they reached the door, "if you can sue as well for yourself as for another I think you might well win any woman."

"Well, Heaven bless you for that!" said Dick Colton to the closing door.

Chapter Ten

The Terror By Night

In every department of scientific inquiry, Professor Ravenden was, above all else, methodical. The extraordinary or unusual he set aside for calm analysis. When he came to a dark passage in his investigations, he made full notes and relied on patience and his reasoning powers for light. Facts of ascertained relations and proportions he catalogued. In crises of doubt, after exerting his own best efforts, he was not too proud to ask counsel, were there any at hand in whose judgment he felt confidence. But first he strove to make his own mind master of the problem.

Thus it was that on the night of September 19, after an evening's moth-hunt, he went to his room and sat down to write. First, however, he changed to pyjamas and dressing-gown, for a sudden shower had soaked his clothing. He then selected from a box a cigar of a brand whose housing and apparel proclaimed it of high price and special flavour, lighted it, and smoked with deep, long puffs. To his daughter or any other who knew him well this would have signified some unusual mental condition, for the abstemious professor used tobacco most sparingly. On this occasion he needed it as a sedative. Professor Ravenden had undergone a severe shock.

For more than three hours he wrote, with long pauses for consideration. Once he rose, strode on slippered feet up and down the room and communed aloud with himself:

"Undeniably I was terrified.... Why otherwise should I have fled?... An object that may well have been harmless and must inevitably have presented aspects of scientific interest.... Perhaps the repetition... the instinct of peril deceived me, fostered by the previous inexplicable occurrences... yet, even in my fright, I incline to believe that I preserved my powers of observation."

When he slept upon the conclusion of his work, there lay amid the wreckage of scriptive revision upon his table three closely written sheets of manuscript.

Waking early the next morning, he aroused Haynes and Dick Colton, and asked them to come to his room as soon as they had dressed. Upon their entrance he bade them to seats, and took up the manuscript.

"In a case of this importance," he said formally, "I shall not apologise, except by mention, for the disorder of my room. It has been my practice in cases presenting difficult aspects to reduce the salient facts to writing, thus preserving the more important features unencumbered with obstructive detail. This method it was which enabled me to throw some new light upon the dimorphic female of the *Papilio turnus* as found in the Blue Ridge chain. In the present instance I design to read to you, gentlemen, a report upon certain strange happenings of last night, and to ask your opinion as bearing upon the mysterious events which have crowded so fast upon each other recently. Before beginning to read, I may state that I never have been afflicted with any aberration of the senses, that I am in sound health, and that after the experiesces which I am about to state I tested both temperature and pulse for possible indications of fever. My temperature was 98.5, which is normal for me, and my pulse, while a trifle irregular, owing to nervous disturbances, was not unusually rapid. Do I present to you, Dr. Colton, any external indications of nervous or functional disorder?"

"Absolutely none, sir," replied the physician promptly. "I should estimate.your temperament to be an unusually calm and rational one."

"Then I shall proceed," said Professor Ravenden, and turning to his manuscript he read:

"Report on certain events noted by Willis Ravenden, F. R. S., Sc.D., at Montauk Point, Long Island, on the evening of September 18, 1902.

"On the evening named I had set forth from Third House with the purpose of seeking a specimen of the *Catocala*. Besides my capturing net, a can of molasses and rum for an insect lure, and the poison jar, I carried, in pursuance of general agreement, a thirty-two-calibre revolver. Passing around the south end of the lake, I selected for my operations a patch of *Quercus ilicifolia* several hundred feet beyond the western shore and perhaps a mile distant from my point of departure, and smeared the leaves with the adhesive mixture. Some success was rewarding my efforts, among other captives being fine specimens of the *Saturnia maia* and the *Dryocampa imperialis*, when a cloud-bank obscured the moon, and the wind which had been blowing lightly from the north became capricious and gusty. Conditions such as these are unfavourable to the pursuit of the nocturnal *lepidopteræ*. Moreover, the darkness was becoming very dense. Hastily closing and packing my net, I set out for home. As nearly as I can estimate it then was about 10 o'clock P. M.

"Owing to the darkness and the irregularity of the ground, my progress was difficult. When I had almost reached, as I estimated, the shore of the lake, I stumbled and fell. As I regained my feet, a strange sound which appeared to come from above and a trifle to the northwest of me attracted my attention. It suggested the presence of some winged creature, although it resembled rather a crackling than a beating or flapping of pinions. It seemed to differ from the strange creaking which I had before noted when abroad at night, and which I at once recalled. Somewhat alarmed, I drew my revolver and cocked it. At this moment the wind, which had been dead from the north, veered in a sharp gust to the northwest. A rushing noise from the blackness above seemed to be drawing near me at a high speed, and as I braced myself for some assault, an object which I believe to have been very large, struck the ground with great violence a few rods, as I judged, to the west of me and came bounding over the earth in my direction. At the same time I discerned a faintly perceptible oily odour.

"For a moment I was paralysed with alarm. I make no concealment or palliation of the emotion. As it seemed, without volition, I then leaped backward, and ran toward the end of the lake. Thus I avoided the advancing object, but only to run into further danger (if danger there was), for I heard another crackling noise of passage, and this time dimly saw in the void a great body pass swiftly above my head. Of the dimensions or shape of this phenomenon I can give no accurate description; but it seemed larger and of more solid bulk than any bird known to me as inhabiting this locality, and its movement suggested rather a skimming progress, borne by the wind, than a measured flight. Throwing myself upon the ground to avoid its notice, I remained until a heavy splash told of its having reached the lake. Then I rose and ran.

"With my first exhaustion of breath came reason. I turned, and while one hardly can answer for his own performances, I intended to return and investigate, for shame burned hot within me. Indeed, I already had retraced my steps for perhaps a hundred feet when there burst upon me a rain-squall so furious that I lost my way completely and was soon floundering in the edge of the lake. Realising my helplessness in this onslaught of the elements, I set out for home, and after an hour's wandering, according to my estimate, reached Third House at ten minutes past eleven.

"Conclusions: That the two objects were presumably a pair of living creatures; that they were either in a state of panic flight, or were water-creatures hastening to refuge, since at least one of them terminated its course in the lake; that they probably were the same creatures whose presence has been noted overhead previously by myself, Mr. Haynes, Mr. Everard Colton and others.

"Query: What relation, if any, do they bear to the death of the sheep on the beach and of the sailor Petersen?"

Professor Ravenden laid his manuscript on the table and looked at his auditors. Haynes had been making notes. Colton sat in rapt attention. Each drew a long breath as the reading closed, and the professor said:

"Gentlemen, have you any suggestions that will throw light upon these phenomena?"

Colton spoke first. "You suggested, before, an air-craft of some kind, perhaps in joke."

"Partly," agreed the professor. "But these were by no means large enough. Air-ships, as you doubtless are aware, are of vast extent."

"Besides, they usually don't travel in pairs," said Haynes. "You can locate the spot where you saw the things, I suppose, Professor?"

"Approximately."

"Then let's start at once," said the reporter, rising.

They made good speed to the lake, and examined its western shore without making any discovery. Spreading out, they scouted carefully, and had gone perhaps fifty yards, studying the ground for possible signs, when Dick Colton, who was in the middle, gave a shout and began to exhibit signs of strangulation. The others ran to him, and he turned a suffused and twitching face toward them, pointing to an oak patch near by.

"Excuse me," he gasped; "but look at that!"

Tangled in the patch was the dilapidated ruin of a large kite of the Malay or tailless type. Most of the paper had blown away, but what remained was of an oily finish, and exhaled a slight odour. Professor Ravenden looked at it carefully, and an expression of deep humiliation overspread his mild face.

"I do not resent your amusement, Dr. Colton," he said. "To you gentlemen I must seem, as indeed I do to myself, an unworthy and fearful disciple of science."

"Not in the least," said Haynes quickly. "Your experience was enough to frighten anyone."

"I should have run like a rabbit," declared Colton positively. "I laughed because it seemed such a ridiculous ending to my own forebodings."

"Perhaps it isn't entirely ridiculous either," said Haynes, who had been examining the kite cord, slowly. "There's something queer about this. Where did those kites come from, and how?"

"Broke away, of course," said Dick.

"Supposing you try to break that string. You're a husky specimen."

"Can't do it," said the doctor, after exerting his strength. "It's the finest kind of light braided line."

"And it hasn't been broken, in my opinion," said the reporter. "Look at those ends."

"Cut! Clean cut!" exclaimed Colton.

"And within twenty feet of the bellyband," added Haynes. "Now, if someone will kindly explain to me how--"

"This line," said the professor, who had been studying it, "is, if I mistake not, one of a string such as are used for aerostatic experiments. The oiled paper is for rain-shedding purposes. It is a subsidiary kite, used to raise the slack of the main line. Therefore the string has not parted at the point of greatest tension."

"And it's as badly crumpled up," added Colton, "as if it had collided with a brick block."

"Its mate ought to have drifted to the opposite shore of the lake," said Haynes. "I'll go look."

Presently he returned with the second kite. It was twin in size and type to the first. The skeleton was intact, though the paper showed signs of its rough trip across the ground before it reached the lake.

"About sixty feet of string left on this one," said the reporter. "Cut clean, just like the other." He laughed nervously. "Begins to look pretty interesting, doesn't it?"

"How many kites do you think there were in the string?" Colton asked the professor.

"Seven is by no means an unusual number in experiments of this nature."

"Then where are the rest?"

"If the main line was severed they may well have been carried out over the ocean. Particularly this would be true if these were the two lowest subsidiary kites."

"Hello! What's this?" said Colton, looking up.

Over the breast of the hill toward the Sound strolled a man. He wore the characteristic garb of the Montauk fishermen, and evidently was from the little colony on the north shore. Haynes walked forward to meet him.

"G'-morning," he said pleasantly. "Did you happen to see anything of a gentleman in a black suit an' eye-glasses, wanderin' absentmindedly about this part of the world?"

"No," said Haynes. "Have you lost such a one?"

"Reckon he's lost himself. Hain't showed up since last evenin'. Just the kind o' man to lose himself in open country. Sort o' crank, always makin' exper'ments."

"What kind of experiments?"

"Foolish doin's with kites, like a kid."

"Is he staying with you?"

"Boardin'. Been there a week. Says he's studyin' air currents. Goes out in the evenin's an' puts up a lot o' kites. I've seen him with as many as seven onto one string. Ee's mighty smart at it."

"What time did he start out yesterday evening?" asked Haynes.

"Long about ha'-past seven. Looked for him back when the wind dropped and come again so uneasy, just before that shower. But no Mr. Ely."

"Is that one of his kites?" asked the reporter, pointing to the broken rhomboid which he had laid in the long grass.

"Certain, sure!" said the fisherman. "Where'd you find it?"

"It came down near here. So did one of the others."

"That so?" said the fisherman, seeming somewhat concerned. "Hope he ain't come to no harm."

While they were talking Professor Ravenden had been making a rapid calculation on a pad.

"I believe that I can lead you approximately to the point whence these kites were flown," he said. "Will you follow me?"

For more than a mile the small and slight professor set them an astonishing pace. Presently he stopped short and picked up the end of a string at the foot of a small hillock.

"This also seems to have been cut," he said, and followed its course.

Beyond the knoll was a hollow, and on the slope of this a small windlass.

"That's his'n! " cried the fisherman. "But where's he?"

Haynes walked over to a small oak patch beyond. For several yards in from the edge the shrubbery showed, by its bent twigs, the passage of a large body. Patches of cloth on the twigs told that a man had torn through in hot haste. On the soil underneath were footprints. But at the end of the path and the footprints was nothing.

"Look here!" Haynes exclaimed. "He rushed in here to escape something. Here's where the trail ends. You can see --"

"My God! Come quick!"

It was the fisherman on the other side of the oak patch. They ran around and found him bending over a body almost hidden in the edge of the thicket, where the scrub was low.

"That's Mr. Ely!" he cried. "He's been murdered!"

The head was crushed in as by a terrific blow. Near the right shoulder the arm-bone protruded from the flesh. Colton lifted the corpse, and there through the breast was the same kind of gash that had slain Petersen.

"It's that cursed juggler," said Haynes bitterly. "Why did we let him get away?"

"This man has been dead for several hours," said the young doctor in a low tone.

"As long ago as ten o'clock last night?" asked Haynes

"Very probably."

"What killed him; the crushing of the skull or the stab-wound?"

"Whichever came first."

"Assuming the correctness of your hypothesis that this unhappy man rushed into the oak patch from the other side, Mr. Haynes, how is the fact that we find his body here, several rods distant from the apparent end of his flight, to be explained?" asked the professor.

"On the ground that he rushed out again," replied the reporter dryly.

"Then you discerned returning footprints?"

"No; there was none there, so far as I could see."

"And there is none here," said Colton, who had been examining the grassless soil under the thick canopy. "But see how the thicket is broken, almost as if he had flung himself upon it. Haynes! What's wrong?"

Without any warning the reporter had thrown up his hands and fallen at full length into the oak. They rushed to his aid, but he was up at once.

"Don't be alarmed," he said, smiling. "I'm all right. Just an experiment. I shall go over with this man to make some inquiries at the fishing colony and arrange for the disposal of the body. It may take me all day. In that case, I'll see you this evening."

He took the fisherman by the arm. The man seemed dazed with horror, and went along with hanging jaw. Colton and Professor Ravenden returned to Third House, in pondering silence.

At the house Dick found himself suffering from a return of his old restlessness. In the afternoon he saw Miss Ravenden, but she evaded even the necessity of speaking to him. With a vague hope of diverting his mind and perhaps of finding some fresh clue, he returned to the lake, and studied the land not only near the spot where the kites had fallen, but between there and the sea-cliff, without finding anything to lighten the mystery.

At nine o'clock Haynes came in, pale and tired, and stopped at Dick's room.

"They have arranged to ship Mr. Ely's body back to Connecticut where he lived," he said. "The fishermen are in a state of almost superstitious terror."

"Anything new?"

"Yes and no. It's too indefinite to talk about. What little there is only tends to make the whole question more fantastic and less possible."

Colton looked at him. "You need sleep, and you need it badly," he said. "Any pain?"

"Oh, the usual. A little more, perhaps."

"Take this," said the other, giving him a powder. "That'll fix you. I wish it would me; I feel tonight as if sleep had become a lost art."

Nodding his thanks, the reporter left. Dick threw himself on his bed; but the strange events of the few days at Montauk crowded his brain and fevered it with empty conjectures. When finally he closed his eyes there returned upon him the nauseating procession of medicine bottles. Then came a bloody sheep, which fled screaming from some impending horror. The sheep became a man frantically struggling in an oak patch, and the man became Dick himself. Almost he could discern the horror; almost the secret was solved. Blackness descended upon him. He threw himself upward with a shriek--and was awake again. When at length he lay back, the visions were gone; a soft drowsiness overcame him, and at the end the deep eyes of Dorothy Ravenden blessed him with peace.

Chapter Eleven

The Body on the Sand

Four days had passed since the schooner came ashore on Graveyard Point. It now was the twentieth of September. The little community in Third House, which had bade fair to be such a happy family, was in rather a split-up state. After their tilt of the day before, Dolly Ravenden and Dick Colton were in a condition of armed neutrality. Dolly was ashamed that her guardian imp had led her to so misrepresent herself to Dick, ashamed too of the warm glow at her heart because he cared so deeply. Thus a double manifestation of her woman's pride kept her from making amends. Dick was longing to abase himself, but wisely took Helga's advice, which he wholly failed to understand. Helga's beautiful voice rang like an invocation to happiness through the house, but Everard Colton sat in gloom and reviled himself because he had promised Dick to stay several days longer. Haynes was irritable because the puzzle was getting on his nerves. Professor Ravenden brooded over the loss of a fine specimen of *Lycæna* which had proved too agile for him, after a stern chase which developed into a long chase early that morning. Breakfast was not a lively meal.

The morning was thick. A still mist hung over the knolls. It was an ideal day for quiet and secret reconnoissance.

"This is our chance," said Haynes after breakfast to Dick Colton and Professor Ravenden. "We'll get the horses and ride out across the point. We may happen on something."

The others readily agreed, and soon they had disappeared in the greyness. Their tacit purpose was to find some trace of the Wonderful Whalley. All the morning they rode, keeping a keen outlook from every hilltop, but without avail. They lunched late at First House and started back well along in the afternoon.

"He may be in any one of those thousand scrub-oak patches," said Haynes as they remounted. "It's like hunting a crook on the Bowery. This fog is thickening. Let's hustle along."

To hustle along was not so easy, for presently a fine rain came driving down, involving the whole world in a grey blur. For an hour the three circled about, lost. From the professor came the first suggestion:

"I believe that I hear the surf," said he. "Guiding our course by the sound, we may gain the cliff, by following the line of which we easily should reach our destination."

"Bravo, Professor!" said Haynes, and they made for the sea.

As they reached the crest of the sand-cliff some eighty feet above the beach, the rain ceased, a brisk puff of wind blew away the mist, and they found themselves a quarter of a mile west of Graveyard Point.

A short distance toward the point a steep gully debouched upon the shore, and a few rods out from its mouth the riders saw the body of a man stretched on the hard sand.

The face was hidden. Something in the huddled posture struck the eye with a shock as of violence. With every reason for assuming, at first sight, the body to have been washed up, they immediately felt that the man had not met death by the waves. Where they stood, the cliff fell too precipitously to admit of descent; but the ravine farther on offered easy access. Half-falling, half-slipping, they made their way down the abrupt declivity to the gully's opening, which was partly blocked by a great boulder, and came upon a soft and pebbly beach, beyond which the hard clean level of sand stretched to the receding waves. As they reached the open a man appeared around the point to the eastward, sighted the body, and broke into a run. Haynes recognised him as Bruce, the Bow Hill station patrol, who had been on the cliff the night of the wreck. Dick Colton also started forward, but Haynes called to him:

"Hold on, Colton. Don't go out on the sand for a moment."

"Why not," he asked in surprise.

"No use marking it all up with footsteps."

At this moment the coast-guard hailed them. "How long has that been there?"

"We've just found it," said Colton.

"I'm on patrol duty from the Bow Hill station," said the other. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Haynes," he added, recognising the reporter.

"These gentlemen are guests at Third House, Bruce," said Haynes. "Here's fresh evidence in our mystery, I fear."

"Looks so," said the patrol. "Let's have a closer look." He walked toward the body, which lay with the head toward the waves. Suddenly he stood still, shaking.

"Good God! it's Paul Serdholm!" he cried. Then he sprang forward with a great cry: "He's been murdered!"

"Oh, surely not murdered!" expostulated Professor Ravenden. "He's been drowned and--"

"Drowned?" cried the man in a heat of contempt. "And how about that gash in the back of his neck? It's his day on patrol from the Sand Spit station, and this is where the Bow Hill and Sand Spit lines meet. Three hours ago I saw him on the cliff yonder. Since then he's come and gone betwixt here and his station. And--" he gulped suddenly and turned upon the others so sharply that the professor jumped-- "what's he met with?"

"Perhaps the surf dashing him on a rock made the wound," suggested Haynes.

"No, sir!" declared the guard with emphasis. "The tide ain't this high in a month. It's murder, that's what it is--bloody murder!" and he bent over the dead man with twitching shoulders.

"He's right," said Colton, who had been examining the corpse hastily. "This is no drowning case. The man was stabbed and died instantly."

"Was the unfortunate a friend of yours?" asked Professor Ravenden benevolently of the coast-guard.

"No, nor of nobody's, was Paul Serdholm. No later than yesterday he picked a fight with me, and --" he broke off and looked blankly at the three men.

"How long would you say he had been dead?" asked Haynes of Colton.

"A very few minutes."

"Then we may catch the murderer!" cried the reporter energetically. "Professor Ravenden, I know I can count on you. Colton, will you take orders?"

"You're the captain," was the quiet reply.

"Then get to the cliff top and scatter, you three. The murderer must have escaped that way. You can see most of the gully from there. Not that way. Make a detour. I don't want any of our footprints on the sand between

here and the cliff."

The patrol hesitated.

"Bruce, I've had twenty years' experience in murder cases," said Haynes quickly. "I'll be responsible. If you will do as I direct for the next few minutes we should clear this thing up."

"Right, sir," said the man.

"Come back here in fifteen minutes, then, if you haven't found anything. Professor Ravenden, I will meet you at the Sand Spit station in half an hour. You the same, Dr. Colton."

As the three started away, Haynes moved up to Colton and said in a low tone: "The same wound?"

Dick nodded. "Without a shadow of doubt. It's Whalley of course. What will you do?"

"Stay here and collect the evidence we shall need."

No sooner had the searchers disappeared up the gully than Haynes set himself whole-heartedly to the work he loved. His nerves were tense with the certainty that the answer was writ large for him to read. Indeed, it should have been almost ridiculously simple. On three sides was the beach, extending eastward and westward along the cliff and southward to the water-line. Inland from where he stood over the body, the hard sand stretched northward, terminating in the rubble at the gully's mouth. In this mass of rubble, footprints would be indeterminable. Anywhere else they would stand out like the mark on a coin.

On their way forward to meet the patrolman the party from Third House had passed along the pebble beach and stepped out on the hard sand at a point east of the body, making a circuitous route. Haynes had contrived this, and as he approached he noted that there were no trail marks on that side. Toward the ocean there was nothing except numerous faint bird tracks, extending almost to the water. Now, taking off his shoes, Haynes followed the spoor of the dead man. Plain as a poster it stood out, to the westward. For a hundred yards he trailed it. There was no parallel track. To make doubly certain that the slayer had not crept upon Serdholm from that direction, Haynes examined the prints for evidences of superimposed steps. None was there. Three sides, then, were eliminated. As inference at first had suggested, the killing was done from the cliff side.

Haynes' first hasty glance at the sand between the body and the ravine's opening had shown him nothing. Here, however, must be the telltale evidence. Striking off from the dead man's line of approach, he walked out upon the hard surface. The sand was deeply indented beyond the body, where his three companions had hurried across to the cliff. But no other shoe had broken its evenness.

Not until he was almost on a line between the body and the mouth of the gully did he find a clue. Clearly imprinted on the clean level was the outline of a huge claw. There were the five talons and the nub of the foot. A little forward and to one side was a similar mark, except that it was slanted differently.

Step by step, with starting eyes and shuddering mind, Haynes followed the trail. Then he became aware of a second, confusing the first, the track of the same creature. At first the second track was distinct, then it merged with the first, only to diverge again. The talons were turned in the direction opposite to the first spoor. From the body of Serdholm to the soft sand stretched the unbroken lines. Nowhere else within a radius of many yards was there any other indication. The sand lay blank as a white sheet of paper; as blank as the observer's mind, which struggled with one stupefying thought: that between the body of the dead lifesaver and the refuge of the cliff no creature had passed except one that stalked on monstrous, taloned feet.

Sitting down upon the beach, Haynes reasoned with himself aloud: "This thing," he said, "cannot be so. You

ought not to have sent the others away. Someone in full command of his eyesight and faculties should be here."

Then, the detective instinct holding faithful, he hastily gathered some flat rocks and covered the nearest tracks, in case of rain. A field sparrow hopped out on the rubble and watched him.

"To-morrow," said Haynes to the sparrow, "I'll pick up those rocks and find nothing under them. Then I'll know that this was a phantasm. I wonder if you're an illusion."

Selecting the smallest stone, he threw it at the sparrow. With a shriek of insulted surprise the bird flew away. Haynes produced a pencil, with which he drew, upon the back of an envelope, a rough but pretty accurate map of the surroundings. He was putting on his shoes when Bruce came out of the gully.

"See anything?" called Haynes.

"Nothing moving to the northward," replied Bruce, approaching. "Have you found anything?"

"Not that you could call definite. Don't cross the sand there. Keep along down. We'll go to Sand Spit and report this."

But the man was staring beyond the little column of rock shelters.

"What's that thing?" he said, pointing to the nearest unsheltered print. "My God! It looks like a bird track. And it leads straight to the body!" he cried in a voice that jangled on Haynes' nerves. But when he began to look fearfully overhead, into the gathering darkness, drawing in his shoulders like one shrinking from a blow, that was too much.

Haynes jumped up, grabbed him by the arm and started him along.

"Don't be a fool!" he said. "Keep this to yourself. I won't have a lot of idiots prowling around those tracks. Understand? You're to report this murder, and say nothing about what you don't know. Later we'll take it up again."

The man seemed stunned. He walked along quietly, close to his companion, to whom it was no comfort to feel him, now and again, shaken by a violent shudder. They had nearly reached the station, when Professor Ravenden and Colton came down to the beach in front of them. Colton had nothing to tell. The professor reported having started up a fine specimen of sky-blue butterfly, which led him astray. This went to show, he observed, that a man never should venture out lacking his net.

"Whalley might have bumped into him, and he probably wouldn't have noticed it," remarked Haynes aside to Colton. "It takes something really important, like a bug, to attract the scientific notice. A mere murderer doesn't count."

"Then you've found evidence against the juggler?" asked Colton eagerly.

"I've found nothing," returned the reporter, "that's any clearer than a bucket of mud."

He refused to say anything more until they were close to the station. Then he tested a hopeless theory.

"The man wasn't stabbed; he was shot," he observed.

"What's the use?" said Colton. "You know that's no bullet wound. You've seen the same thing twice before,

not counting the sheep, and you ought to know. The bullet was never cast that could open such a gap in a man's head. It was a broad-bladed, sharp instrument with power behind it."

"To Dr. Colton's opinion I must add my own for what it is worth," said Professor Ravenden.

"Can you qualify as an expert?" asked the reporter with the rudeness of rasped nerves. He was surprised at the tone of certainty in the scientist's voice as he replied:

"When in search of a sub-species of the *Papilionidæ* in the Orinoco region, my party was attacked by the Indians that infest the river. After we had beaten them off, it fell to my lot to attend the wounded. I thus had opportunity to observe the wounds made by their slender spears. The incision under consideration bears a rather striking resemblance to the spear gashes which I saw then. I may add that I brought away my specimens of *Papilionidæ* intact, although we lost most of our provisions."

"No man has been near enough the spot where Serdholm was struck down to stab him," Haynes said. "Our footprints are plain: so are his. There are no others. What do you make of that?" He was not yet ready to reveal the whole astounding circumstance.

"Didn't I hear somethin' about that juggler that was cast ashore from the *Milly Esham* bein' a knife-thrower?" asked Bruce timidly. "Maybe he spiked Serdholm from the gully."

"Then where's the knife!" said Haynes. "He'd have to walk out to get it, wouldn't he?"

"You must have overlooked some vestigia," said the professor quietly. "The foot may have left a very faint mark, but it must have pressed there."

"No; I'm not mistaken. Had you used your eyes, you would have seen."

"How far did Bruce's footprints go?" asked Colton.

The three looked at the coast-guard, who stirred uneasily. "Gentlemen," said he, "I'm afraid there's likely to be trouble for me over this." His harassed eyes roved from one to the other.

"Quite likely," said Haynes. "They may arrest you."

"God knows, I never thought of killing Serdholm or any other man!" he said earnestly. "But I had a grudge against him, and I wasn't far away when he was killed. Your evidence will help me, unless--" he swallowed hard.

"No; I don't believe you had any part in it," said Haynes, answering the unfinished part of the sentence. "I don't see how you could have unless you can fly."

The man smiled dismally. "And then about those queer tracks--"

"Nothing about that now," interrupted Haynes quickly. "You'd better report to your captain and keep quiet about this thing."

"All right," said Bruce. "Good-night, gentlemen."

"What's that about tracks?" asked Colton.

"I want you and the professor to come to my room sometime this evening," said the reporter. "I'll have a full

map drawn out by then, and I want your views. Perhaps you'd better feel my pulse first," he added, with a slant smile.

Colton looked at him hard. "You're excited. Haynes," he said. "I haven't seen you this much worked up. You've got something big, haven't you?"

"Just how big I don't know. But it's too big for me."

"Well, after you've got it off your mind on paper you'll probably feel better."

"On paper?"

"Yes; you'll report it for your office, won't you?"

"Colton," said the reporter earnestly, "if I sent in this story as I now see it, it would hit old Deacon Stilley on the telegraph desk. The Deacon would say: 'Another good man gone wrong,' and he'd take it over to Mr. Clare, the managing editor. Mr. Clare would read it and say: 'Too bad, too bad!' Then he'd work one of the many pulls that he's always using for his friends and never for himself, and get board and lodging for one, for an indefinite period at reduced rates, in some first-class private sanitarium. The 'one' would be I. Let's go inside."

For two hours Haynes talked with the men in the life-saving station. Then he and Professor Ravenden and Colton walked home in silence, broken only by the professor.

"I wish I could have captured that *Lycæna*," he said wistfully.

Chapter Twelve

The Senatus

All five of the men who composed the male populace of Third House gathered in Haynes' room at ten o'clock that night. Everard Colton and old Johnston had been told briefly of the killing of Serdholm.

"Thus far," said Haynes, addressing the meeting, "this vigilance committee has been a dismal failure. Had anyone told me that five intelligent men could fail in finding the murderer, with all the evidence at hand, I should have laughed at him."

"Some features which might be regarded as unusual have presented themselves," suggested Professor Ravenden mildly.

"Unusual? They're absurd, insane, impossible! But there are the dead bodies, man and brute. We've got to explain them, or no one knows who may come next."

"We've got to be careful, certainly," said Colton; "but I think if we can capture Whalley, we'll have no more mysterious killings."

"Oh, that does very well in part; but it doesn't fill out the requirements," said the reporter impatiently. "Now, I'm going to run over my notes briefly, and if anyone can add anything, speak up. First, the killing of the seaman, Petersen, on the night of the shipwreck. That was on the thirteenth, an uncanny date, sure enough. Next, the killing of the sheep by the same wound, on the fourteenth, and on the same evening Professor Ravenden's experience with some threatening object overhead."

"Pardon me; I did not ascribe any threatening motive or purpose to the manifestation," put in the professor. "Indeed, if I may challenge your memory, I suggested an air-ship. It seems that the unhappy aero-expert's kites well may have been the source of the sound I heard."

"Let us assume so for the present. Next we come to Mr. Colton's encounter and the death of the mare on the evening of the fifteenth."

"The kites again, of course," said Everard.

"Even allowing that--and I expect to get conclusive proof against it later--what, then, chased the animal over the cliff?"

"Maybe the kites came down later and blew along the ground after her. If you were a horse, and a string of six-foot kites came bounding along in the darkness after you, wouldn't you jump a cliff?"

"Ask Professor Ravenden," suggested Haynes maliciously.

"The jest is not an unfair one," said the scientist good-humouredly. "I fear that I should."

"Charge the death of the mare to the kites, then. Pity we can't lay the sheep to their account too. The third count against them is Professor Ravenden's adventure of the eighteenth, and the death of the aeronaut. As to Professor Ravenden's part, there remains to be explained the cutting of the kite strings, if they were cut."

"That must have been done, it would seem, in mid-air, just as Petersen the sailor was killed," said Dick Colton.

Haynes looked at him quickly. "Colton, you're beginning to show signs of reasoning powers." he said. "I think I'd better appoint you my legatee for the work, if my turn should come next."

"My dear Haynes," Professor Ravenden protested, "under the circumstances that remark at least is somewhat discomforting."

"You're quite right, Professor. Down with presentiments! Well, as Dr. Colton suggests, there's a rather interesting parallel between the mid-air killing of the sailor and the mid-air cutting of the kite cord. Let that go, for the present. Mr. Ely's death we can hardly ascribe to his own kites. There's the cutting of the string near his hand."

"That blasted Portuguese murderer, Whalley," said Johnston.

"Most probably. The wound is such as his big knife would make; we know he's abroad on the knolls. But why should he kill Mr. Ely, whom he never saw before, and why in the name of all that's dark should he cut the kite strings?"

"Murderous mania; the same motive that drove him to kill the sheep," said Dick Colton. "As for the kite string, perhaps he got tangled in it."

"There is no tangle," replied the reporter, "except in the evidence. But we'll call that Whalley's work. We come to to-day's murder now. Who did that?"

"Without assuming any certainty in the matter, I should assume the suspicion to rest upon the juggler," said Professor Ravenden.

"Motive is there," said Dick Colton. "What Serdholm told us about his thumping Whalley shows that."

"Yes; but there is motive in the case of Bruce also. And we know that Bruce was there. Moreover, he was on the cliff-head when Petersen came in, and the two wounds are the same."

"Surely," began the young doctor, "you don't believe that Bruce--"

"No, I don't believe it," interrupted the reporter; "but it's a hypothesis we've got to consider. Suppose Bruce and Serdholm recognised this man Petersen as an enemy, and Bruce slipped a knife into him as he took him from the buoy?"

"But I thought Petersen was killed halfway to the shore."

"So we suppose; but it is partly on the testimony of these two that we believe it, corroborated by circumstantial evidence. Now, if Bruce killed the sailor, Serdholm knew it. The two guards quarrelled and fought. Bruce had reason to fear Serdholm. There's the motive for the murder of Serdholm. He met him alone--there is opportunity. I think the case against him is stronger than that against Whalley, in this instance. I've looked into his movements on the night of the sheep-killing and the murder of Mr. Ely. He was out on the former, and in on the latter."

"That weakens the case," said Everard Colton.

"Yes; but what ruins the case against both Bruce and Whalley in the killing of Serdholm is this." Haynes spread out on his table a map which he had drawn. "There is the situation, sketched on the spot. You will see that there are no footprints other than our own leading to or going down from the body. Gentlemen, as sure as my name is Haynes, the thing that killed Paul Serdholm never walked on human feet!"

There was a dead silence in the room. Dick Colton's eyes, narrowed to a mere slit, were fixed on the reporter's face. Johnston's jaw dropped and hung. Everard Colton gave a little nervous laugh Professor Ravenden bent over the map and studied it with calm interest.

"No," continued Haynes, "I'm perfectly sane. There are the facts. I'd like to see anyone make anything else out of it."

"There is only one other solution," said Professor Ravenden presently: "the fallibility of the human senses. May I venture to suggest again that there may be evidences present which you, in your natural perturbation, failed to note?"

"No," said the reporter positively. "I know my business. I missed nothing. Here's one thing I didn't fail to note. Johnston, you know this neck of land?"

"Lived here for fifty-seven years," said the innkeeper.

"Ever hear of an ostrich farm hereabouts?"

"No. Couldn't keep ostriches here. Freeze the tail-faithers off 'em before Thanksgiving."

"Professor Ravenden, would it be possible for a wandering ostrich or other huge bird, escaped from some zoo, to have its home on Montauk?"

"Scientifically quite possible in the summer months. In winter, as Mr. Johnston suggests, the climate would be too rigorous, though I doubt whether it would have the precise effect specified by him. May I inquire the purpose of this? Can it be that the tracks referred to by the patrol were the cloven hoof-prints of--"

"Cloven hoofs?" Haynes cried in sharp disappointment. "Is there no member of the ostrich family that has claws?"

"None now extant. In the processes of evolution the claws of the ostrich, like its wings, have gradually--"

"Is there any huge-clawed bird large enough and powerful enough to kill a man with a blow of its beak?"

"No, sir," said the professor. "I know of no bird which would venture to attack man except the ostrich, emu or cassowary, and the fighting weapon of this family is the hoof, not the beak."

"Professor," interrupted Haynes, "the only thing that approached Serdholm within striking distance walked on a foot armed with five great claws. You can see the trail on this map." He produced a large sheet of paper on which was a crude but careful drawing. "And there is its sign-manual, life-size," he added, pushing a second sheet across the table to the scientist.

Imagination could hardly picture a more precise, unemotional and conventially scientific man than Professor Ravenden. Yet, at sight of the paper his eyes sparkled, he half started from his chair, a flush rose in his cheeks, he looked keenly from the sketch to the artist, and spoke in a voice that rang with a deep under-thrill of excitement:

"Are you sure, Mr. Haynes--are you quite sure that this is substantially correct?"

"Minor details may be inexact. In all essentials that will correspond to the marks made by something that walked from the mouth of the gully to the spot where we found the body and back again."

Before he had fairly finished the professor was out of the room. He returned almost immediately with a flat slab of considerable weight. This he laid on the table, and taking the drawing, sedulously compared it with an impression, deep-sunken into the slab. For Haynes a single glance was enough. That impression, stamped as it was on his brain, he would have identified as far as the eye could see it.

"That's it!" he cried with the eagerness of triumphant discovery. "The bird from whose foot that cast was made is the thing that killed Serdholm."

"Mr. Haynes," said the entomologist dryly, "this is not a cast."

"Not a cast?" said the reporter in bewilderment. "What is it, then?"

"It is a rock of the cretaceous period."

"A rock?" he repeated dully. "Of what period?"

"The cretaceous. The creature whose footprint you see there trod that rock when it was soft ooze. That may have been one hundred million years ago. It was at least ten million."

Haynes looked again at the rock, and superfluous emotions stirred among the roots of his hair.

"Where did you find it?" he asked presently.

"It formed a part of Mr. Johnston's stone fence. Probably he picked it up in his pasture yonder. The maker of the mark inhabited the island where we now are this land then was distinct from Long Island--in the incalculably ancient ages."

"What did this bird thing call itself?" Haynes demanded. A sense of the ghastly ridiculousness of the affair was jostling, in the core of his brain, a strong shudder of mental nausea born of the void into which he was gazing.

"It was not a bird. It was a reptile. Science knows it as the pteranodon."

"Could it kill a man with its beak?"

"The first man came millions of years later--or so science thinks," said the professor. "However, primeval man, unarmed, would have fallen a helpless victim to so formidable a brute as this. The pteranodon was a creature of prey," he continued, with an attempt at pedantry which was obviously a ruse to conquer his own excitement. "From what we can reconstruct, a reptile stands forth spreading more than twenty feet of bat-like wings, and bearing a four-foot beak as terrible as a bayonet. This monster was the undisputed lord of the air; as dreadful as his cousins of the earth, the dinosaurs, whose very name carries the significance of terror."

"And you mean to tell us that this billion-years-dead flying swordfish has flitted out of the darkness of eternity to kill a miserable coast-guard within a hundred miles of New York, in the year 1902?" broke in Everard Colton.

"I have not said so," replied the entomologist quickly. "Rut if your diagram is correct, Mr. Haynes, if it is reasonably accurate, I can tell you that no living bird ever made the prints which it reproduces, that science knows no five-toed bird, and no bird whatsoever of sufficiently formidable beak to kill a man; furthermore, that the one creature known to science which could make that print, and could slay a man or a creature far more powerful than man, is the tiger of the air, the pteranodon."

"Evidence wanted from the doctor!" cried Haynes. "Colton, can you add anything to this theory that Serdholm was killed by a bayonet-beaked ghoul that lived ten or a hundred or a thousand million years ago?"

"I'll tell you one thing," said the doctor: "The wound isn't unlike what a heavy, sharp beak would make."

"And that would explain the sailor being killed while he was coming in on the buoy!" exclaimed Everard Colton. "But--but this pteranodon--is that it? Oh, the deuce! I thought all those pterano-things were dead and buried long before Adam's great-grandfather was a protoplasm."

"My own belief is that Mr. Haynes' diagram is faulty," said Professor Ravenden, to whom he had turned.

"Will you come and see?" challenged Haynes.

"Willingly. Would it not be well to take the rock along for comparison?"

"Then we'd better all go," said Everard Colton, "and carry the rock in shifts. It doesn't look as if it had lost any weight with age."

As the party reached the large living-room, Helga Johnston sprang up from the long cushioned rest near the fireplace. Her face was flushed with sleep. In the glow of the firelight an expression of affright lent her beauty an uncanny aspect. Her breath came in little gasps, and her hands groped and trembled.

"What is it, Miss Helga?" cried Everard, running eagerly forward.

Unconsciously her fingers closed on his outstretched hand, and clung there.

"A dream!" she said breathlessly. "A horrid dream!" Then turning to Haynes: "Petit Père, you aren't going out to-night?" she said, glancing at the lanterns which her foster-father had brought.

"Yes, Princess, we're all going."

"Into danger?" asked the girl. She had freed herself from Colton's grasp, but now her eyes fell on his again.

"No; just to clear up a little point. We shall all hang together."

"Don't go to-night, Petit Père!" There was an imploring intonation in the girl's flute-like voice.

Haynes crossed over to her rapidly. "Princess, you're tired out and nervous. Go to bed, won't you?"

"Yes; but promise me--father, you too, all of you--promise me you won't any of you let yourselves be alone."

"My dear child," said Professor Ravenden, "I'll give you my word for the party, as I am the occasion of the expedition."

"I--I suppose I am foolish," Helga said; "but I have dreamed so persistently of some terrible danger overhanging--floating down like a pall." With a sudden gesture she caught Haynes' hand to her cheek. "It hung over you, Petit Père!" she whispered.

"I'll throw a pebble at your window to let you know I'm back alive and well," he said gaily. "I've never seen you so nervous before, Princess."

"You'll hardly need the lantern," said the girl, walking to the door, and looking up at the splendid moon,

sailing in the unflecked sea of the Heavens.

"When you're looking for foot-prints on the sands of time," observed Everard, "you need the light that never was on sea or land."

He dropped back as the exploring party filed out into the night, and fell into step with Professor Ravenden.

"Isn't it true," he asked, "that all these flying monsters are extinct?"

"Science has assumed that they were extinct," said the Professor. "But a scientific assumption is a mere makeshift, useful only until it is overthrown by new facts. We have prehistoric survivals. The gar of our rivers is unchanged from its ancestors of fifteen million years ago. The creature of the water has endured; why not the creature of the air?"

"But," said Colton combatively, "where could it live and not have been discovered?"

"Perhaps at the North or South Pole," said the professor. "Perhaps in the depths of unexplored islands; or possibly inside the globe. Geographers are accustomed to say loosely that the earth is an open book. Setting aside the exceptions which I have noted, there still remains the interior, as unknown and mysterious as the planets. In its possible vast caverns there well may be reproduced the conditions in which the pteranodon and its terrific contemporaries found their suitable environment on the earth's surface, ages ago."

"Then how would it get out?"

"The recent violent volcanic disturbances might have opened an exit."

"Oh, that's too much!" Haynes broke in. "I was at Martinique myself, and if you expect me to believe that anything came out of that welter of flame and boiling rocks alive--"

"You misinterpret me again," said the professor blandly. "What I intended to convey was that these eruptions were indicative of great seismic changes, in the course of which vast openings might well have occurred in far parts of the earth. However, I am merely defending the pteranodon's survival as an interesting possibility. As I stated before, Mr. Haynes, I believe the gist of the matter to lie in some error of your diagram."

"We'll see in a moment," said Haynes; "for here's the place. Let it down easy, Johnston. Wait, Professor, here's the light. Now I'll convince you."

Holding the lantern with one hand, he uncovered one of the tracks with the other. The mark was perfectly preserved. "Good God! " said the professor under his breath.

He dropped on his hands and knees beside the print, and as he compared the to-day's mark on the sand with the rock print of millions of years ago, his breath came hard. Indeed, none of the party breathed as regularly as usual. When the scientist lifted his head, his face was twitching nervously.

"I have to ask your pardon, Mr. Haynes," he said. "Your drawing was faithful."

"But what in Heaven's name does it mean?" cried Dick Colton.

"It means that we are on the verge of the most important discovery of modern times," said the professor. "Savants have hitherto scouted the suggestions to be deduced from the persistent legend of the roc and from certain almost universal North American Indian lore, notwithstanding that the theory of some monstrous, winged creature widely different from any recognised existing forms is supported by more convincing proofs.

In the north of England, in 1844, reputable witnesses found the tracks, after a night's fall of snow, of a creature with a pendent tail, which made flights over houses and other obstructions, leaving a trail much like this before us. There are other corroborative instances of a similar nature. In view of the present evidence, I would say that this unquestionably was a pteranodon, or a descendant little altered, and a gigantic specimen, for these tracks are distinctly larger than the fossil marks. Gentlemen, I congratulate you both on your part in so epoch-making a discovery."

"Do you expect a sane man to believe this thing?" Haynes demanded.

"That's what I feel," said Everard Colton. "But, on your own showing of the evidence, what else is there to believe?"

"But, see here," Haynes expostulated, all the time feeling as if he were arguing in and against a dream. "If this is a flying creature, how explain the footprints leading up to Serdholm's body, as well as away from it?"

"Owing to its structure," said the professor, "the pteranodon could not rise rapidly from the ground in flight. It either sought an acclivity from which to launch itself, or ran swiftly along the ground, gathering impetus for a leap into the air with outspread wings. Similarly, in alighting, it probably ran along on its hind feet before dropping to its small fore feet. Now, conceive the pteranodon to be on the cliff's edge, about to start upon its evening flight. Below it appears a man. Its ferocious nature is aroused at the sight of this unknown being. Down it swoops, skims swiftly with pattering feet toward him, impales him on its dreadful beak, then returns to climb the cliff and again launch itself for flight."

All this time Haynes had been holding one of the smaller rocks in his hand. Now he flung it toward the gully and turned away, saying vehemently: "If the shore was covered with footprints, I wouldn't believe it! It's too--"

He never finished that sentence. From out of the darkness there came a hoarse cry. Heavy wings beat the air with swift strokes. In that instant panic fell upon them. Haynes ran for the shelter of the cliff, and after him came the Coltons. Johnston dropped on hands and knees and scurried like a crab for cover. Only the professor stood his ground; but it was with a tremulous voice that he called to his companions:

"That was a common marsh or short-eared owl that rose. The *Asio accipitrinus* is not rare hereabouts, nor is it dangerous to mankind. There is nothing further to do to-night, and I believe that we are in some peril remaining here, as the pteranodon appears to be nocturnal."

The others returned to him ashamed. But all the way home they walked under an obsession of terror hovering in the blackness above.

It was a night of restless and troubled sleep at Third House. For when the incredible takes the form of undeniable reason, and demands credence, the brain of man gropes fitfully along dim avenues of conjecture. Helga's premonition of impending disaster lay heavy upon the household.

Chapter Thirteen

The New Evidence

The morning of September 21 impended in sullen splendour from a bank of cloud. As the sudden sun struggled into the open it brought a brisk blow from the southwest, dispelling a heavy mist. The last of the fog was being scoured from the earth's face when Dick Colton was awakened from an unrefreshing sleep by a quick step passing down the hall. Jumping out of bed, he threw open the door and faced Haynes.

"Don't wake the others," said the reporter in a low voice.

"Where are you off to?" inquired Colton.

"To the beach. I've got a notion that I can settle this Serdholm question here and now."

"Wait fifteen minutes and I'll go with you."

"If you don't mind, Colton, I'd rather you wouldn't. I want to go over the ground alone, first. But if I'm not back for breakfast, meet me there and I'll probably have something to tell you."

"Very well. It's your game to play. Good luck! Oh, hold on. Have you got a gun?"

"No, mine hasn't come yet."

"Better take mine."

"You must have been having bad dreams," said the other lightly. "What sleep I've had has banished the professor's cretaceous jub-jub bird from my mental premises. Anyhow, I don't think a revolver would be much use against it, do you?"

"Take it, anyway," urged Colton.

"All right," assented the reporter. "Much obliged. I'll take it along if you want me to."

The doctor handed out his long Colt's. "Well, good luck!" he said again, and with a strange impulse he stretched out his hand.

Haynes seemed a little startled; but he said nothing, as he shook hands, except: "See you in a couple of hours, then."

Although it was only six o'clock, Dick Colton could not get back to sleep. A sound of splashing water from Everard's room showed that he too was up. Dick was dressing with those long pauses between each process which are the surest sign of profound thought in the masculine creature, when he heard a knock on Haynes' door followed by the music of Helga Johnston's voice.

"Petit Père. Oh, Petit Père!"

Before Dick could reach the door and explain, the low call came again:

"Petit Père! Oh, please wake up!"

"Miss Helga," began Dick, thrusting out his head.

"Oh, Dr. Colton, I've--I've had such a dreadful dream again. I want to speak to Mr. Haynes."

"He started for the beach fifteen minutes ago."

"Oh-h-h!" It was a long, shuddering gasp. The next instant he heard her swift footsteps patter downstairs, through the living-room and out upon the porch. A few minutes later Everard Colton in trousers and shirt came into the room.

"Was that Helga's voice I heard?"

"Yes."

"Anything wrong?" asked the young man anxiously.

"Haynes has gone to the beach, and she has followed. She's had a dream-warning or some fool thing"--Colton had the professional impatience of the supernatural--"and would be hysterical if she was of that type."

Everard exploded into a curse. "And you let her go alone?"

"Am I likely to do a cross-country run in my underclothes?" demanded his brother.

The young man was down the stairs in two leaps, and out upon the lawn. Helga's fair head shone far to the south on a hillock's top. She was running.

"Take the cross-cut!" shouted Dick Colton. "You can head her off at Graveyard Point. I'll follow."

There were few men of his time who could keep near Everard Colton to the end of a mile run. Heartbreaking country this was, with its ups and downs; but the young man had the instinct of a cross-country runner, and subconsciously his feet led him along the easiest course. When he came out on the summit of the cliff above Graveyard Point, his eyes, eagerly searching, saw the flying figure of the girl he loved coming down the beach, a quarter of a mile away.

"Helga, Helga!" he shouted. "I'm coming to you!"

Her ringing soprano came back to him, like an echo magically transmuted into golden beauty: "The other side! Around the point."

She waved him vehemently toward the hidden shore beyond the headland. Something of her foreboding terror passed into the soul of her lover. Plunging down into the gully, Everard ran out upon the beach and doubled the point. Whatever peril there was, if any existed, lay there; he would reach it first. The waves almost washed his feet as he toiled through the loose sand at the base of the little ravine. Breathless, he pushed on until he reached the point, where he had full view of the stretch of sand. Then at what he saw the breath came back to him in one gasping inhalation. He stopped short in his tracks, and stood shaking.

The sun had just risen above the cloudbank. Black, on the shining glory of the beach, a man lay sprawled grotesquely. It was almost at the spot where Serdholm had been found. Though the face was hidden and the posture distorted, Everard knew him instantly for Haynes, and as instantly knew that he was dead. He ran forward and bent over the body.

Haynes had been struck opposite the gully, by a weapon driven with fearful impetus between his ribs from the back, piercing his heart. A dozen staggering prints showed where he had plunged forward before he fell. The flight was involuntary--for he was dead almost on the stroke--the blind, mechanical instinct of escape from the

death-dealing agency. There was no mistaking that great gash in the hack. Haynes had been killed as Serdholm was.

Sickening with the certainty of what he was to find, Everard Colton turned his eyes to the tablet of the sand. There, exactly as the ill-fated reporter had drawn it on his map, the grisly track of the talons stretched in double line across the clean beach, toward the gully's mouth. Except for this the sand was blank.

For a few steps he followed the trail, then turned back to the body. In the pocket he found his brother's revolver. So Haynes had been struck down without warning! For the moment, shock had driven from Colton's mind the thought of Helga. Now he rose to fend her from the sight of this horror, and saw her moving swiftly around the point.

"Go back!" he cried. "You must not come nearer!"

With no more heed of him than if he were a rock in her path, the girl made a half-circle of avoidance, and sinking upon the sand gazed into the dead man's face. The eyes were closed, and from the calm features all the expression of harshness had fled. Gone were the lines of pain; the dead face wore for Helga the same sweetness and gentleness that, living, Haynes had kept for her alone, and the lips seemed to smile to her as she lifted the head to her lap and smoothed back the hair from the forehead.

"He is dead?" she asked dully, looking up at Everard.

"Yes," said the young man.

"I warned him," she whispered. "I saw it so plainly--death flying across the sands to strike him. Oh, Petit Père, why didn't you heed me? Couldn't you trust the loving heart of your little princess?"

In that moment Everard Colton forgot his hopes. A great surge of pity and grief for the girl rose within him. It came to him that she had loved the better man, the man who lay dead on the sands, and as the first pang of that passed there was left in him only the sense of service. Throwing his coat across Haynes' body, he bent over Helga.

"My dear," he said, "my dear."

That was all; but her woman's swift intuition recognised the new feeling and responded to it. She groped for his hand and clung to it.

"Don't leave us!" she said pitifully.

"I will wait here with you," he answered.

Slowly the tide rose toward the mournful little group on the sand. An investigating gull swooped down near to them, and the girl roused with a shudder from her reveries, thrusting out her hands as if to ward off the bird.

"It was like that in my dream," she said, looking up at Everard with tearless eyes. "Oh, why did I not compel him to heed my warning! He used to say the sea-spirits that brought me in from the storm had given me second sight. Why did he not trust in that?"

"He loved you very dearly," said Everard gently.

"Ah, you do not know what he was to me!" cried the girl. "Everything that was noble, everything that was generous. From the time when I was a child--Oh, he can't be dead. Can't you do something?"

Everard choked. Before he could command himself for a reply, there was a rattle of stones down the face of the cliff. Necessity for action was a boon to his tortured sensibilities. Catching up the revolver from the spot where he had laid it, he walked toward the sound. A confused noise of voices caused him to drop the muzzle of his weapon, as Dick Colton, Professor Ravenden and his daughter came into view.

"Too late, Dick," said Everard.

"Good God!" said Dick. "Not Haynes?"

Everard nodded. "He was dead when we got here."

With a little, broken cry, Dolly Ravenden flew to Helga and threw her arms around the girl's neck.

Dick Colton drew the coat from the body, looked at the wound, and then followed the tracks to the spot where they disappeared in the soft rubble. Returning, he said to Dolly Ravenden:

"Get Miss Helga away."

"She won't come. I can't persuade her to move," said Dolly.

Everard came and knelt beside the girl. "Helga," he said, "Helga, dear, you must go back home. We will bring him as soon as we can. Will you go back with me now, dear?"

"Yes," said the girl.

Bending over, she kissed Haynes' forehead. She got to her feet, and Everard and Dolly Ravenden led her away. Dick leaned over the dead face and looked down upon it with a great sense of sorrow and wrath. So gazing, he recalled the reporter's half-jesting charge that he should take up the trail, "if my turn comes next."

"It's a promise, old man," he said softly to the dead. "You might have left me your clue; but I'll do my best. And until I've found your slayer or my turn comes I'll not give up the work that you've left to me."

Meantime Professor Ravenden had been examining the marks with every mark of deep absorption. "Professor Ravenden!" called Dick somewhat impatiently.

The professor turned reluctantly.

"This--is--a very interesting case," he muttered brokenly. "I--I will notify the coast-guard."

And Dick saw, with amazement, before the dry-as-dust scientist turned again to post down the beach, that his eyes were filled with tears.

Chapter Fourteen

The Early Excursion

In every Anglo-Saxon there is something of the bloodhound. Sorrow for Haynes' tragic death had merged with and intensified in the mind of Dick Colton a haggard demand for vengeance. He was surprised to find how strong a liking for the reporter had grown out of so brief an acquaintance. With equal surprise, he realised that his every instinct now was set to the blood-trail, that the duty of following the mystery to a definite conclusion possessed his mind to the exclusion of all else. Not quite all, either, for the thought of Dolly Ravenden lay deeper than the mind.

One salient fact asserted itself: Whatever may have been the agency of the other murders, Harris Haynes' slaying was indubitably the same as that of Paul Serdholm. But what possible motive of murder could comprise these two? Could Bruce be the solution? Following what he thought would have been the processes of the reporter's keen mind, Colton, after sending necessary telegrams, visited the Bow Hill station. Bruce was not in. He had gone out early that morning, ostensibly to fish. To the officer in charge Colton briefly stated the facts, and suggested that Bruce be detained when he returned, which was agreed to readily, though not without the expression of a hearty disbelief in the coast-guard's having had anything to do with the killing.

"Give a dog a bad name!" said the officer. "Because Bruce was around when Serdholm was killed, he's suspected of this job. He told me Mr. Haynes was helping to clear him of the other killing."

"That is true," replied Colton. "Haynes did not think him guilty. Nor do I. But there are suspicious circumstances."

It was late in the afternoon when the Coroner, who had driven fifteen miles to reach the spot, had finished his work, and Haynes' body was brought to the house. From the official investigation nothing had resulted. Bruce was examined, and was pitifully nervous, but told a straight enough story of his fishing and exhibited several fish in corroboration.

Colton felt helpless in this maze. Late in the afternoon Dolly Ravenden came to him. Her brilliant beauty was dimmed and softened by traces of tears, and to the man's longing heart she never had appealed with so irresistible a charm.

"Dr. Colton," she said, "I don't know what to do about Helga. She is like a dazed person. Your brother and I have been with her constantly. She has not broken down once. The tears seem frozen within her. I am frightened for her reason. She seems to blame herself for this dreadful thing."

"There is something I want her to know," said Dick. "Will you tell her?"

"Had you not better see her yourself?"

"I think not. You will tell her better. It is this: Poor Haynes had not a year to live. He knew this himself."

"How did you know?" asked the girl incredulously.

"He told me of the disease that was killing him. It was when I asked him whether I might send for Everard to come down."

"Then you let me accuse you wrongly," she said very low. "Why did you not tell me that Mr. Haynes knew of Everard's coming? Was it fair in you to let me be so unfair? I am ashamed of myself for the way I spoke to you. I have been ashamed."

She raised her appealing eyes to his and moved a step nearer him. Dick held his breath like a man afraid of dispelling some entrancing vision.

"I did not mean it," she went on bravely, though her eyes fell before his look. "When I saw how it hurt you I was sorry."

"It is for me to beg your pardon," said Dick hoarsely, "for believing your words against what my own heart told me of you. You know why it hurt me so?"

"Yes," she said, in sweet acceptance of his reason.

"Dolly, do you care at all?" he cried, stretching out his hands to her.

"I don't know," she faltered. "Don't ask me yet. It has been so short a time. I must speak of Helga now."

"Yes," said Dick, "I shall wait, and wait happily." And--so strange a thing is the heart of woman--a pang of disappointment accompanied the quick thrill of admiration in Dolly's heart at her lover's loyalty and self-repression.

"I will tell her what you say," said Dolly. She paused for a moment, and then a wonderful smile flickered over her sobered beauty.

"It ought to have been Helga you cared for," she said. "But I'm glad it isn't!" And she was gone.

The evening train brought, in response to Dick's telegram, a grave and quiet young fellow who introduced himself as Eldon Smith, a reporter from *The New Era*, Haynes' paper, and an older man with a face of singular beauty, whose name was a national word by virtue of his gifts as an editorial writer. Archer Melbourne had been the dead man's only confidant. He at once took charge.

"I have heard from Mr. Haynes within a week," he said to Dick Colton. "If I believed in such things, I should say that he had a premonition of death. He is to be buried in the hill behind Third House, so he wrote me. His property, which is considerable, including his life insurance, goes to Miss Helga Johnston, in trust, until her marriage. I am named as one trustee, and he writes me to ask you to act as the other."

"Surely Haynes must have had friends of older standing," began Dick, "who--"

"Haynes had few intimates. He was a quick and keen judge of men, and you seem to have inspired a strong confidence. There is a peculiar request attached. He asks that you use all your influence to guard Miss Johnston against making any marriage under conditions which you could not approve for the woman you loved best in the world."

"God helping me, I will!" said Dick solemnly.

"As for the circumstances of Haynes' death, the stories I heard are too wild for credence."

"So are the facts," said Dick briefly.

"Eldon Smith came down on the train with me. There is no keener mind in the newspaper business than his. Of course, he comes to represent his paper at Haynes' funeral. The managing editor and others of the staff will be down to-morrow. Meanwhile, I think Smith will be investigating. Perhaps you will tell him what you know."

To the two newspaper men Dick Colton recited the facts. Smith took an occasional note, and left with the brief comment: "I've never come across anything like this before. If Mr. Haynes couldn't make it out, there isn't much chance for anyone else. But I'll do my best."

After the close of the interview, Everard Colton came into Dick's room.

"Good Heavens, Ev," said Dick. "You look ten years older. Brace yourself up, man."

"Dick," said his brother, "I've given up. I see now I was a fool to think I ever could win Helga. I'm going to stick by her until this thing is over, and then I'll go back."

"Don't be too sure," began Dick; but checked himself, remembering his promise to the girl.

"That is what Dolly said," replied the other hopelessly. "But I've had my eyes opened. I know now what sort of fellow Haynes really was. How could a man such as I win out against that kind of man?"

"Anyway," said Dick, "Helga needs you at this time; you and Miss Ravenden. You won't leave now, Ev."

"Oh, I'll stand by," came the weary answer. "I don't mean to whine; but I'll be glad when I can get away. Even if I thought there was any chance--Oh, a fellow can't fight the dead; it's too cowardly!"

"Ev," said Dick affectionately, "you don't know--How is she now?" he asked, breaking off suddenly.

"Just the same. Mr. Melbourne saw her for a few minutes, and brought her some old letters of Haynes'. She has them, but we can't rouse her to read them."

"Has Miss Ravenden told her of Haynes' illness?"

"What illness? Dolly's been trying to tell her something; but Helga doesn't seem to comprehend."

"She will come out of that daze presently," said Dick. "You'd better go back to her, Ev."

Late that evening Eldon Smith knocked at Dick's door, and found Dick talking with Professor Ravenden.

"It certainly is the most extraordinary case in my experience," said the young reporter. "So many people had wallowed all over the place before I got there that there was nothing to be had from the sand, except two trampled remains of those remarkable tracks. You are sure there were no footprints?"

"Absolutely," replied the professor and Colton in a breath.

"And you say Mr. Haynes was sure that there was none leading to the body of the man Serdholm?"

"So he positively declared."

"Of course the pteranodon theory is out of the question."

"Professor Ravenden does not so consider," said Dick.

"I beg your pardon, Professor; I understand --"

"That the pteranodon still exists is by no means impossible," said Professor Ravenden. "That the mysterious marks correspond to the fossil track is undeniable. I cannot so lightly dismiss the theory that a reptile of this

supposedly extinct species did the killing."

"Well, all that I can do is to try again tomorrow. Good-night," and the reporter left.

"If Haynes were alive," said Colton as the young man went, "he would go down to the beach the first thing in the morning. That is what I am going to do."

"Do you think it safe?" queried the professor.

"Not entirely," replied the other frankly; "but I'll have a revolver."

"Little enough avail was that to our poor friend," said Professor Ravenden. "Suppose I accompany you?"

"Thank you, sir," said Dick. "If you care to go, I should be glad to have you. But suppose you come across the knolls while I follow Haynes' course along the beach. We'll meet at the spot. You of course will go armed?"

"Certainly. Yes, I think your plan a good one."

For Dick Colton there was little sleep that night. After midnight he was sent for to see Helga. At last she had come out of her semi-stupor, and had given way to such a violence of grief that Dolly and Everard were terrified. Having given her an opiate and ordered Everard to bed, Dick sat up with his own troubled conjectures until nearly dawn. Barely three hours of dozing had been his portion when he woke again.

With his shoes in his hand, he crept downstairs and started for the beach. He had set out early, because, despite the chill in the air, he wished to take a plunge in the sea to freshen himself up. Brief indeed was the plunge; consequently Dick Colton was in a fair way to reach the rendezvous some minutes before the arrival of the professor.

At Graveyard Point he climbed the cliff and took a long look around. A mist, moving along from east to west, cut off his view in one direction. Descending to the beach, he readily found the spot where Haynes' body had lain. By way of precaution he made sure that his revolver was in condition for instant use. Although a slight rain had fallen, blurring the writings on the sand, and there had been almost total destruction by the trampling of those who had taken Haynes' body away, there still was left some material for study. The remains of the five-taloned marks Colton set himself to consider.

Once there came a startling interruption, in the sliding of some gravel down the gully. Pistol in hand, Dick whirled, and for ten monstrously elongated seconds listened to the irregular beats of his heart as he waited. Satisfied at length that it was only a chance avalanche in miniature, he got down on his hands and knees above the plainest of the vestigia. There was the secret, if he only could read it. Had Haynes solved it and met his death at the moment of success? For perhaps two or three minutes the young doctor remained in his crouched posture, his mind immersed in speculation. Then he rose, facing the sea, and as he stood and looked down there came to him a sudden glow of illumination.

"By the heavens! I've got it!" he cried.

He started forward to the next mark. As he advanced, something sang in the air behind him. He knew it was some swiftly flying thing; knew in the same agonised moment that the doom of Haynes and Serdholm was upon him: tried to turn and face his death--and then there was a dreadful, grinding shock, a flame with jagged edges tore through his brain, and he fell forward into darkness.

Chapter Fifteen

The Professor Acts

Promptitude was one of Professor Ravenden's many virtues. Only one thing could make him forget the obligation of an engagement; that was his dominant ardour for the hunt. In time this had become an instinct. So it is not strange that, on leaving Third House to keep his rendezvous with Dick Colton, he should have absentmindedly hung his heavy poison-jar for specimens around his neck, and taken up his butterfly net, while entirely forgetting his revolver.

As chance would have it, there rose about the same hour as Professor Ravenden a delicate little butterfly with wings like the azure glory of the mid-June heavens. It was taking the air on a leaf of scrub-oak, while waiting for the sun to come out, when the entomologist came striding over the knolls, and brushed against the shrub. Up fluttered the beautiful insect, and the blue of its wings caught the eager eye of Professor Ravenden. It was of the same species which once before had lured him from the greater pursuit.

"*Lycæna pseudargiolus*," he muttered, as he hastily affixed his collapsible net;. "From its brightness, it should be a fall specimen, and undoubtedly shows the variations on the lower wing which I am studying. Wait one moment, my friend, and I shall welcome you to the hospitality of my cyanide jar."

After a brief flight the insect settled down well toward the centre of another patch of shrubbery. Having prepared his net, the hunter set about forcing his way into this patch, but before he was in reach of his prey the pressure on the close-knit vegetation had disturbed the sensitive insect and again it rose, this time in alarm. Though barely an inch across the wings, this species exhibits capacities for flight greater than that of much larger butterflies. When again it alighted, the pursuer, panting and perspiring, had been drawn in a semi-circular course, some hundreds of yards inland. This time he did not get near enough for a trial of his net before the elusive creature was off again. The third flight was a briefer one. After tentative flutterings, the *pseudargiolus* alighted on a marshmallow leaf in a hollow. Taking profit of his previous failures, Professor Ravenden sat down and got his breath while waiting for the quarry to lapse into a state of undisturbed quietude. Thus, it was easy presently for the hunter to net it and transfer it to the cyanide jar. This done, he realised with a start of conscience that he had wasted ten minutes, and was a quarter of a mile off the track of his engagement. With all speed, he pointed across the knolls toward the beach.

Fog was drifting in from the ocean, giving added incentive to haste. Wisest it would be, the professor judged, to make for the near point of the cliff, so that he might have a line to follow should mist blot the landscape. The beach below was just dimming with the advance of the first folds of grey when Professor Ravenden reached the brink. The nearer sands were cut off from his vision by a rise between himself and the rendezvous. As his eye ranged to the west for the readiest access to the level, it was caught and held by the outstretched body of Dick Colton lying upon the hard sand out from the mouth of the ravine where Serdholm and Haynes had met their death.

For the moment the scientist was stunned into inaction. Suddenly the body twitched, and there swept over the unhappy entomologist a dreadful sense of his own negligence and responsibility. Along the heights paralleling the beach-line he ran at utmost speed, dipped down into a hollow where, for the time, the prospect was shut off, and surmounted the slope beyond, which brought him almost above the body, and a little to the east of the gully. Meantime the fog had been closing down, and now, as the professor reached the spot, it spread a grey and wavering mantle between him and what lay below.

Already he had attained the gully's edge, when there moved out upon the hard sand a thing so out of all conception, an apparition so monstrous, that the professor's net fell from his hand, and a loud cry burst from him. Through the enveloping medium of the mist, the figure swayed vaguely, and assumed shapes beyond comprehension. Suddenly it doubled on itself, contracted to a compact blur, underwent a swift inversion, and

before the scientist's straining vision there arose a man, dreadful of aspect indeed, but still a human being, and as such, not beyond human powers to cope with. The man had been moving toward the body of Colton when the professor's shout arrested him. Now he whirled about and stood facing the height with squinted eyes and bestially gnashing teeth.

To delay him was the one chance for Colton's life, if Colton indeed were not already beyond help.

"If I only could get down the gully!" thought the professor, and dismissed the thought instantly. Time for any course except the direct one now was lacking. The one way lay over the cliff.

"Stand where you are!" he shouted in a voice of command, and before the words were fairly done he was in mid-air, a giddy terror dulling his brain as he plunged down through the fog. Fortunately--for the bones of fifty-odd years are brittle--he landed upon a slope of soft sand. Pitching forward, he threw himself completely over, and carried to his feet by the impetus, charged down the slope upon the man.

It was the juggler. So much the professor realised as he sped forward. Mania of murder was written unmistakably on the seamed and malignant face and in the eyes, as the man turned them on the professor. His posture was that of a startled beast, alert and alarmed. Beyond him, near the sprawled body of Colton, a huge knife with an inordinately broad blade stuck, half upright, in the sand. Toward this the maniac had started, but turned swiftly with a snarl, and crouched, as the intrepid scientist ran in upon him.

Exultation, savage and keen, a most unscientific emotion, blazed up in Professor Ravenden as he noted that his opponent had little the advantage of him in size and weight. What little there was would be offset by his own natural wiriness of frame which a rigid habit of life and out-of-door exercise had kept from the deterioration of age. The scientist came in, stooping low, and, stooping low, the murderer met the onset. The two closed. With a sudden, daunting shock the entomologist realised, as Whalley's muscles tightened on his, that he had met the strength of fury. For a moment they strained, Professor Ravenden striving for a grip which should enable him to break the other's foothold. Then with a rabid scream the creature dashed his face into the professor's shoulder. Through cloth and flesh sheared the ravening teeth, until they grated on the shoulder-blade.

Instantly the aspect of the duel changed. For, upon the outrage of that assault, a fury not less insane than the maniac's fired the professor, and he who always had prided himself upon a considered austerity of the emotions, was roused to the world-old, baresark thirst of murder which lies somewhere, black and terrible, in the soul of every courageous man, and, sends him, at the last, straight to the throat of his enemy.

Power flushed through his veins; his muscles distended with the strength of steel. Driving his fingers deep under the chin, he tore the hideous, distorted face from his shoulder. His right hand, drawn back for a blow, twitched upon the cord from which depended his heavy poison-bottle. Shouting aloud, he swung up the formidable weapon and brought it down upon the juggler's head with repeated blows. The man's grasp relaxed. Back for a fuller swing Professor Ravenden leaped, and crushed him to the ground. The thick glass was shattered, and on the blood-stained sands a little spot of heaven's blue fluttered in the breeze, instantly to be trampled under foot.

Suddenly the scientist swayed and lurched forward. An influence as potent for death as the most murderous weapons of man was abroad, loosed when the glass shattered. The deadly fumes of the cyanide, rising from the base of the jar which its owner still held, were doing their work. With barely sense enough surviving to realise his new peril, he flung it far from him. A mist fell, like a curtain, somewhere between his eyes and his brain, befogging the processes of thought. Heavily he dropped to his hands and knees over the feet of the senseless juggler, his face toward Colton.

Colton seemed to have risen. This the professor took to be a figment of his reeling brain. It annoyed him.

"Lie down! Be quiet!" he muttered. "You are dead, and I am going to kill your murderer!"

Calling up all his will-power, he crawled to the juggler's head and set his fingers to the palpitating throat. Another moment and the death of a fellow-man would have been upon the soul of the scholarly scientist, when an arm under his chest and an insistent voice in his ear brought him back to reason.

"In God's name, Professor, don't strangle the poor devil!"

The baresark grip relaxed. Professor Ravenden collapsed, rolled over on his back and looked up stupidly into the white face of Dick Colton.

"Where--where--is my *pseudargiolus*?" he asked plaintively.

"It's all right, professor; there wasn't any *pseudargiolus*. Just lie quiet for a moment."

Professor Ravenden struggled up to a sitting posture. "Let me rise," he cried. "I have lost my specimen of *pseudargiolus*. It fell when the jar broke."

He looked about him, and his eyes fell on the juggler.

"The pteranodon?" he queried. The mist was clearing from his brain, and his mind swung dizzily back to the great speculation.

"What does it all mean?" he groaned.

"There is the pteranodon!" And Colton laughed shakily as he pointed to the blood-smeared form lying quietly on the sand.

"But those footprints! Those footprints! The fossil marks on the rocks!"

"Footprints on the rock. Handprints here."

"Handprints?" repeated the professor. "Tell me slowly, I implore you. I must confess to an unaccustomed condition of bewilderment "

"No wonder. The juggler killed his men by knife-play. He lay hidden in the mouth of the gully, and threw the knife as they came along. After killing them he had to recover his knife. So he walked out upon his hands, leaving the marks which have puzzled us so."

"But why?"

"He is coming to. We'll ask him."

In a few minutes "The Wonderful Whalley" was able to sit up and answer questions. All his rage seemed to have gone, and all his cunning. He was cowed and weak and indifferent.

"Why did you kill Serdholm?" asked Colton.

"He beat me," was the reply.

"And what had you against Mr. Haynes?"

"He sink I was murderer; zat I kill ze sailor."

"And against me?"

"I see you follow ze trail. I sink you find me."

"So I probably should. I just had seen the resemblance between my handprint and yours and had jumped forward to examine the next print, when I was struck."

"Zat jomp safe you," said the juggler. "Ze butt of ze knife hit as it turn or you would be dead."

He spoke in a matter-of-fact way. While waiting until he should be able to walk, they got a detailed confession from him. He told with perfect frankness of the killing of Serdholm and Haynes and the attack on Colton; but he flatly and rather nonchalantly denied the murder of Petersen the sailor, and the slaying of the sheep.

Coming to the killing of the kite-filer, Colton set a trap for him. "Why did you club him after you had given him the knife?"

"Who?" said the juggler, his eyes growing wide.

"Mr. Ely, the man we found dead two nights ago with your knife-wound in his back."

Whalley displayed a pitiable agitation.

"Ze tall, still man, ze man at ze fisher-house? He ees dead? " he cried.

"You ought to know."

"I sink he was dead," said the juggler simply. "I hear zat sound up in ze air."

Once more he threw his hands upward in that shuddering gesture which had startled them the night of the wreck.

"Zen I hear him cry like a dead man. A great an' terreeble cry! I run to my place an' hide away."

"He heard the kites," said Colton to Professor Ravenden. Then to the juggler:

"Now, Whalley, what put it into your head to walk out on your hands after your knife when you killed Mr. Haynes and Serdholm?"

"To make it like ze ozzer tracks," he replied promptly.

"What other tracks?" cried the two men in a breath.

"Ze tracks of eet. I do not know. I see zem; but I do not know. Come, I show you."

He got unsteadily to his feet, and, guarded on either side, led them down the beach toward the Sand Spit station. After walking about a third of a mile he stopped and cast about him.

"Zere!" he said triumphantly, pointing.

Following the instruction, they made out traces of blood and the prints of a lamb's hoof. Leading out to the spot was the dreadful familiar double spoor of talons.

"You did that too," accused Colton.

For refutation "The Wonderful Whalley" dropped to his knees and laid his hand over one of the marks. The hand more than completely covered the prints.

"You zee?" he said triumphantly.

"Whalley, what made that mark there?" said Professor Ravenden.

Again that strange gesture from the juggler and the quick shuddering in-draw of the shoulders.

"Ze death-bird, maybe," he said.

Nothing more could be gotten from him. They delivered him at the coast-guard station to be turned over to the authorities. When he was out of their hands, Professor Ravenden insisted on returning to look for the remains of his lost specimen, and was relieved at finding one wing intact. Not until he had carefully folded this in paper did he turn to Dick Colton with the question:

"What is your opinion of our problem now?"

"I'm at my wit's end," said Dick. "Possibly we've got on the trail of another hand-walking knife-thrower."

"Or the death-bird, the pteranodon," returned Professor Ravenden quietly.

Chapter Sixteen

The Lost Clue

In his own way, Professor Ravenden possessed as keen a detective instinct as Haynes himself.

The variation of a shade of a moth's wing, the obscurest trait in the life-habit of some unconsidered larva form, was sufficient to set him to the trail, and sometimes with results that, to his compeers, seemed little short of marvellous. Science had been enriched by his acumen, in several notable instances, and thousands of farmers who had never heard his name owed to him the immunity of certain crops from the ravages of their most destructive insect enemy.

In this work the pedantic professor was a true zealot. So much did his enthusiasm partake of the ardour of the hunt that he had found himself in the readiest sympathy with Haynes' sharp and practical capacities. Now, for the first time, he had seen a problem in his own department assume an aspect of immediate and tremendous human importance. That his part in the solution should be worked out with flawless perfection was become a matter of conscience, a test of honour. Sure as he was of his ground, he determined to prove to the utmost, the solidity of his foundation.

"Have you other fences than the one which I know, built of the cretaceous rock?" he asked Johnston.

"You'll find some in the farthest lot back, I reckon," said Johnston. "Look near the corners of the fence for them slabs."

"If you have a wheelbarrow," began the scientist when the other interrupted him.

"You wasn't thinking of going up there now, was you?"

The professor assented.

"Alone?" said Johnston. "It's gettin' toward dark, too. Hadn't I better go with you?"

"I shall be gone but a few moments," said the professor with some impatience. "It was my design, in case I found any further imprints to bring back the rocks in the wheelbarrow for careful inspection."

"You go in and get your revolver, Professor," said Johnston, "and I'll have Henkle run the barrow up there for ye."

Henkle was a young Swedish boy, known to possess no English and suspected of having little more wits. With some difficulty he was made to understand what was expected of him; so, having had the barrow handles inserted in his hard young palms, and the professor pointed out to him he patiently trudged along in the wake of the savant, out across the hollows.

In a brief time the professor had found indications on half a dozen of the rocks. Glowing with enthusiasm, he loaded them into the barrow, and set a homeward pace, that made the sturdy little Swede gasp before he had covered half the distance.

McDale, the reporter for one of the "yellow" papers, saw them from his window, coming into the yard.

"A good chance to get something from the professor," he thought, and ran down to accost him.

Henkle, the Swede boy, hung about, open-mouthed and staring stupidly.

"Go away. You're through. Skip!" said McDale, indicating dismissal with a sweeping gesture.

Unfortunately the sweep of his arm was toward the field whence the pair had just come with their find. The tired boy uncomplainingly picked up the handles of his barrow again and trudged away, unnoticed by the professor, who was now deep in the study of the first rock.

"See," he cried excitedly to McDale. "This is unquestionabIy the print of a smaller specimen than ours; a young pteranodon, doubtless, or perhaps a lesser sub-species."

Pretending an absorbed interest, the reporter drew out the simple-hearted professor, who, showing rock after rock in explanation, elaborated his theory. McDale, hurrying upstairs to make his notes--he had been afraid to "pull a pencil" on the scientist, lest he check the enthusiastic flow of ideas--ran into Eldon Smith.

"Get anything?" asked Smith, in the brief formula of the newspaper world.

"Sunday stuff, and a corker!" said McDale. "You wouldn't want it; but it's hot stuff for us, with a scare-devil double-page drawing of the Pteranodaceus Dingbattius, and Professor Ravenden's photograph as large as we can get it."

"Pretty tough on the professor," said Eldon Smith. "He's rather a square old party."

"Oh, I'm not going to fake him," protested the other. "And of course I won't guy him. That would put a crimp in the story."

"You know what his reputation will be in the scientific world, after he's been made to stand for a wild-eyed nightmare like this?" said the other.

"Oh, he'll be down and out," agreed the dealer in sensations. "But that ain't my business. And the cream of it is that he believes in this gilly-loo bird, as if he'd seen it."

Eldon Smith jumped to the window and throwing it up with a bang, leaned out into the darkness.

"Did you hear that?" he cried.

McDale was beside him instantly. They stood, rigid, intent, as a faint, woeful, high-pitched scream of abject terror quivered in the still air.

Instantly the house was alive. Somebody was calling for lanterns. Another voice was shouting to Professor Ravenden to come back, to wait, not to venture out into the night without light. The two reporters, with the Colton brothers, got to the piazza at the same time.

Meantime the shrieks grew louder. They came short and at regular intervals, with an almost mechanical effect.

"That's like hysteria," said Dick Colton. "Can anyone make out just where it comes from?"

As if in reply, the professor's precise accents were heard.

"This way. He is here."

There was a rush of the men. "I have him," called Professor Ravenden.

Once more the voice was raised, but subsided into a long, sobbing moan. Then the savant staggered into view,

carrying the limp form of the young Swede.

"He has fainted," he said. "He was rushing by me, quite unheeding my call, when I caught him and he fell, as if shot. I trust he is not injured."

"Unhurt," said Dick Colton, "but literally frightened almost to death."

Henkle came to half an hour later. No explanation could be had of him, other than a shuddering indication of some overhanging terror. Once he made a sweeping gesture of the arms, much as had Whalley on the night of the wreck. The physician gave him a sleeping powder and arranged to see him early in the morning.

He never saw the boy again. With the first light he was gone, and his little belongings with him. Afterward they found out that he had walked to the station, and taken the morning train.

"There's a possible clue lost," said Dick Colton to the professor, "that might have helped us."

But Professor Ravenden was little concerned. He had discovered a print which might possibly indicate a rudimentary sixth toe on the pteranodon and he was absorbed in measurements.

Chapter Seventeen

The Professor's Sermon

Following the injunction left by Haynes, they buried him in the wind-swept knoll behind Third House. A clergyman who had been sent for from New York took charge of the services, which were attended by the score of newspaper men and the little Third House group. A pompous, precise, and rather important person, was the clergyman; encased within a shell of prejudice which shut him off from any true estimate of the man over whose body he was to speak.

In Haynes he was able to see only an agent in a rather disapproved enterprise, mighty, indeed, but, to his unseeing eye, without the ideals which he had formulated for himself, and for those upon whom he imposed his standards. So his address was purely formal; with a note of the patronising and the exculpatory as if there were something to be condoned in the life which the reporter had laid down.

At the end there were sneering faces among the newspaper men. Helga wore an expression of piteous bewilderment; Dick Colton's teeth were set hard; and Dolly Ravenden's dark beauty glowed with suppressed wrath. To the surprise of all, as the minister closed, Professor Ravenden got to his feet hesitantly and nervously.

"My friends," he said, "before we part I wish to add a slight tribute to what little we may say of the dead. For me to speak to you of his qualifications of mind and character would be an impertinence. But as a follower of what we call science I have one word to speak.

"To see the truth, exact and clear, is given to no human. Now and again are born and matured minds which solve some small portion of the great problem that we live in. These are the world's master intellects, the Darwins, the Linnæuses, the Cuviers, the Pasteurs. Borrowing their light, we perhaps may illuminate some tiny crevice, and thus pay our part of the human debt. That is the task to which the scientist sets his long and patient efforts.

"And this is achieved how? By an instinct which asserts itself potently in a certain type of humanity, in the highest type which we know. For want of a better term, I may call it the truth-vocation. The truth-seeker may concern himself with the smallest scale of a moth's wing; he may devote himself to the study of the human soul in its most profound recesses; or he may strive with the immediate facts of life. Lie his field of endeavour where it may, his is the one great calling. Your friend and my friend who lies dead before us was of that world-old army. He died under its flag and on the field of honour.

"His part was to seek the truth in the whirling incidents of the moment. With what complete absorption and self-forgetfulness he gave himself to the task, you know better than I. Perhaps you do not know, as I did not until after his death, that he clung to his appointed work against the ravages of a slow, pain-racked and mortal illness. The great Master of Destiny whose universe proceeds by immutable laws has seen no priest of old called to martyrdom, no prophet risen to warn the nations, no discoverer inspired to enlarge the ken of mankind, with a truer vocation than the seeker in a lesser field whom we honour here.

"He has gone to his own place. Whether he still seeks or has found, is not for us. For us is the legacy of a single-minded devotion and a straightforward nobility of character that cannot but have made and left its impress wherever exerted."

How strangely work the influences of sympathy! The reporters who listened with warming hearts to the simple man of science had come to Haynes' funeral primarily as a mark of respect, but secondarily because of their interest in a remarkable "story." Whispers of the professor's pteranodon theory had passed about. One or two of the men besides McDale of the "yellow," had questioned him shrewdly, and had seen that he would

commit himself to that theory. This meant a big sensation. The practice of journalism tends to dwarf the imagination and to make men skeptical of all that lies beyond the bounds of the usual. Not one of the reporters there took the slightest stock in the theory of a prehistoric monster. Nevertheless, the mere word of a man so eminent in the scientific world as the entomologist would be enough to "carry the story," and make it a tremendous feature. Columns of space were in it. But it meant also, as every reporter there believed, the downfall of Professor Ravenden's repute in a cataract of ridicule. As soon as the newspaper group re-gathered at Third House, McDale spoke.

"I'm going to do what I never expected to do," he said. "I'm going to throw my paper down."

"On the Ravenden story?" asked Eldon Smith.

McDale nodded gloomily. "It would have been such a screamer!" he said, shaking his head. "But it goes to the scrap-heap. Not for mine after that little sermon."

"I think we're all agreed, fellows," said Challoner of the *Morning Script*, the dean of the gathering. "We all feel alike, I guess, about Professor Ravenden. I've heard funeral sermons by the greatest in the country; but nothing that ever came home to me personally. Now, if we print this pteranodon story and back it up with interviews, it's a big thing; but where does the professor come in? We've got to save him from himself. The pteranodon feature has got to be suppressed. Is that understood?"

There was no dissent. In all the days while the reporters stayed about waiting for the "news interest" to peter out of the mystery, not one hint of the professor's "wild theory" found its way into print.

As time passed with no new developments, the reporters dropped in one by one to say good-bye to Professor Ravenden before they took train for New York. Since then the professor often has had cause to wonder why, whenever he has spoken in public, the newspapers all over the country have treated him with such marked consideration, often overshadowing the utterances of more prominent speakers with his. He does not know how small is the world of journalism and how widely and swiftly travels "inside news."

Of the newspaper crowd, Eldon Smith was the last to leave. He had a talk with Dick Colton, who rode over to the train with him.

"Are you satisfied that Whalley was the author of all the killings?" asked the reporter.

"No, I'm not," returned the doctor. "It leaves altogether too much unexplained. I wish I could believe in the professor's pteranodon."

"On account of the marks that Whalley showed you?"

"Not that alone. Just consider all the weak points in the theory that Whalley is guilty of all the crimes. First: why should he confess part and not all?"

"That's not unusual."

"But have you ever known such a case where the murderer was as frank as Whalley? How are you going to ascribe any part in Petersen's death to the juggler? He couldn't have thrown his knife in that blackness."

"I suppose it must have been done aboard the vessel before the man left in the breeches-buoy."

"The evidence of the sailors is all against that. However, let it go at that. How about the sheep? Why did he kill that?"

"For food. He was camping somewhere on the knolls, and he had to eat."

"And he was frightened away before he could make way with the carcass? Well, that's tenable. Now we come to the unhorsing of my brother. That might have been caused by poor Ely's kites, as I figure it. They broke away, came zigzagging past and frightened the mare into insanity. Afterward they scared her over the cliff."

"I don't think so," said Eldon Smith. "In fact, it's impossible."

"Impossible? How?"

"Dr. Colton, did it ever occur to you to look up the weather records for that night?"

"No."

"I've looked them up. The wind was from the southeast. Your brother was less than a mile from the south shore. Mr. Ely was staying on the Sound shore, northwest of there, and almost directly down the wind. Now, how could the kites travel up wind from Ely to the place where your brother had his alarm?"

Colton shook his head.

"Moreover," continued the reporter, "the mare when she rushed to destruction ran in the face of the wind. So the loose kites couldn't have pursued her."

"That's true; but I see no reason why Ely mightn't have walked across the point and flown from the ocean side that evening."

"Here is what I copied from his calendar diary for that night: 'Sept. 17th. Temperature notes of no value. Upper currents fluctuant. Flew from hillock 1-4 mile from Sound. Kites moving northward out over the Sound. Furled kites at 9:30.' (The time of your brother's experience more than two miles away.) 'Results unsatisfactory.' Is that definite enough?"

"Certainly, it seems so."

"It certainly does. Now, about the aerologist. What was the cause of death?"

"It might have been either the stab-wound or the crushing of the skull."

"The skull was badly crushed?"

"Yes, and the right arm and shoulder were fractured."

"From what cause?"

"My reading of it is this: Whalley, crazy with desire to murder, crept up on this poor fellow. Ely heard or saw him coming and fled into the oak patch; but Whalley's knife-throw cut him down. Then the juggler, in a murderous frenzy, beat his victim with a heavy club."

"Picked up his body and flung it to the spot where it was found?" suggested the reporter as a conclusion

"What do you mean? No man could throw a body that far."

"That would be my judgment."

"No," mused Dick. "Whalley must have carried the body out and dropped it where it was found."

"For what conceivable reason."

"Perhaps some idea that he was hiding it better. Perhaps for no reason at all. Reason plays little part in an insane murderer's processes."

"But an insane murderer leave tracks the same as any other man, and unless Haynes was completely fooled there were no such tracks or breakage of the shrubbery around the spot where you found the body, as must have been made by a man breaking his way through, particularly if he were carrying a heavy body."

"What are you driving at?" asked Colton.

"Well," said the reporter thoughtfully, "this Ely business seems to me just about the strangest phase of this whole mystery. And it's the strangest, most incomprehensible features of a problem that most often give you your clue."

"Have you found one?"

"I've been thinking of another possible cause of such fractures as you described. Might not a fall have caused them?"

"Not unless it was from a height. And how could he have fallen from a height?"

"That is what I should like to know," said Eldon Smith. "The scrub-oak where you found the body is badly smashed down--much more crushed and broken than the mere toppling over of a man would account for."

Swift light broke in upon Colton. "That is what Haynes was trying to determine when he fell into the oak," he cried.

"Trust him for that. Did he get down on his hands and knees afterward?"

"Yes," cried the doctor. "What was he after?"

"He was examining a deep indentation in the ground beneath the shrubbery that just fits a man's head and shoulders as it would strike were the man falling headlong."

"Headlong? From the empty air?"

"From the empty air," assented the other.

"You mean that his kites were a sort of flying-machine?"

"It may be. Or he may have become entangled in the lines and carried up after vainly struggling through the shrubbery."

"But the wound? Could he have struck on some sharp-pointed stake, and wriggled off in his death convulsions?" mused Colton.

"You're a physician. Could he?"

"No, no, a thousand times no!"

"Well?"

"It was Whalley," said Dick Colton reflectively. "Perhaps the kite-flyer fell near him, and in his unreasoning terror Whalley used his knife. And his own fear that he spoke of, of the terror impending over him, may have driven him to the murder."

"It must be so," said the reporter. "I see nothing else for it. But I don't believe it all the same."

"Well, I don't know that I do, either, for that matter," said Colton, as they drew in at the station.

Chapter Eighteen

Readjustments

It was a week since the burial of Harris Haynes. What remained of the mystery as a surplus over and above the Whalley confession was still unenlightened by any further clue. The juggler had refused steadfastly to add anything to his statement. Little opportunity had there been of acquiring new information, for storm had followed storm in quick succession, and though Dick and Everard Colton had been out on the knolls at all hours of day and night, and the intrepid professor, eluding his daughter by stealth, had covered many dark miles of exploration, the shrouded foulness of the weather had preserved whatever secret Montauk Point still might hold.

To Dick Colton had come a deep content, for he and Dolly had been drawn to a close comradeship in the high pressure of events. Yet by a subtle defence she had withheld from him anything more than comradeship. Once again he had spoken; and she had stopped him.

"Please, Dr. Colton!" she said. "Nothing that you can say will make any difference. If I come to you," she looked at him with the adorable and courageous straightforwardness that seemed in his eyes the final expression of her lovableness, "I shall come of myself. As yet, I do not know. I am growing to know you. It has been a very brief time."

"It has been a crowded lifetime," said Dick earnestly. "But I can wait, Dolly. You don't mind if I call you that?"

"Even Everard does that," she said, smiling, and to his surprise there followed a sharp blush. She had recalled the self-betraying exasperation with which she had resented, the day before, Everard's addressing her, with apparent innocence, as "Sister Dot," and that youth's meek enjoyment of her anger.

That had been the dying effort of Everard's gaiety. In that week he had grown worn and morose. More than once he would have left the place; but Dolly Ravenden urged upon him that he should stay until Helga had regained her normal balance. To the girl's warm and full-blooded beauty had succeeded a wan loveliness that made Everard's heart ache whenever he looked at her. Seldom did he see her alone; little had she to say to him. Yet her eyes brooded upon him, and he felt vaguely that he was a help to her in her grief. Dick too had insisted upon this. But Helga seemed to make no effort at rallying from her sombre apathy.

The week of storm ended, and the sun blazed out over a landscape bedecked with autumn's royal colours. Helga, who had risen early to go to the beach, found at her place an envelope which had not come by mail. There was an enclosure in a woman's handwriting. Once and again she went through, turning from red to white. Then she turned to Dick Colton.

"You did this?" she said.

"Yes."

"Oh, I cannot, I cannot!" she cried passionately, and ran from the door, out upon the knolls.

Dick saw her climbing the hill, the joyous wind wreathing the curves of her lithe and gracious form, to the place where Haynes was buried, and watched her until a shoulder of the knoll shut her completely from view.

"It was high time for an antidote," he said, nodding thoughtfully. "Haynes would have had me do it; I know he would."

Helga knelt by a high boulder that crowned the knoll and arranged the flowers that she had brought up that morning for her friend's grave.

"Oh, Petit Père," she whispered sobbingly, "if you only were here to tell me! It is hard to know what is best. So hard!"

Something moved in the bushes not far away. The shrubbery parted, and there emerged on all fours the squat and powerful figure of "The Wonderful Whalley." He was unkempt and white; the murderousness was gone from his face. As a dog cringes, expectant of a blow, he moved reluctantly forward. The girl faced him with a tense carriage in which was no inkling of fear.

"Ze lady shall forgive ze poor arteest," he said, holding out hands of supplication.

"I would kill you if I could," she said, very low.

"The Wonderful Whalley's" hand went to his belt, but the great-bladed knives no longer were there. Fumbling in his pocket, he drew forth another knife, opened it and threw it at her feet

"I am ready," he said.

Helga looked at the knife, and then at him with unutterable loathing. The man gave a little groan.

"Do not!" he said. "I was cr-r-razy! Eet ees gone, now. Eet was ze beating of ze sea. I haf not know zat I keel until now I break out of my preeson las' night an' come here to ask you to forgive."

"No," said the girl stonily.

"To beg you to forgive an' to warn you." With a strikingly solemn gesture he raised his hand, and swept it through the circle of the heavens.

"We may not know when eet strike," he said slowly. "Ze danger ees there. Eet ees hanging over you an' over me. Me, I may not escape my fate. Eet ees not matter. But you, so young, so lofely, so brave, so kind to ze poor arteest--I come to warn you, perhaps to safe you."

"Do you know that this is the grave of the man you killed?" she said, her eyes fixed upon his.

Simply, and as a child might, the juggler kneeled at the grave. He clasped his hands and raised his face, the eyes closed. With a pitying, yet abhorrent surprise, the girl watched him. His lips moved. She caught a half whispered word, here and there, in the soft southern tongue. In the midst of his prayer the murderer leaped to his feet. His muscles stiffened; he was all attention.

"Someone come!" he cried.

Over the brow of the knoll came Everard Colton. "My God!" he cried, and bounded toward them.

Like a flash, the juggler wormed himself into the oak patch, and emerging from the farther side sprinted over the hill and disappeared.

"Has he hurt you?" cried the young man. "Helga, my dear! tell me he has not hurt--"

"No," she said very low. "He was quite peaceable. He has escaped from jail. I think he is sane again and remorseful."

"You must let me take you home," he said. "You must! Good heavens, Helga, anything might have happened."

Everard was shaking as with an ague. A wonderful softness came into the girl's face. "Were you coming to speak to me?"

"To say good-bye," he said.

"Good-bye? " she repeated. "So soon? Must it--"

He stopped her with a swift, savage gesture. "Helga, I can't stand it any longer! I would give you the last drop of my blood, gladly, willingly, if it would help you. But to be here as I am, to see you every day, is more than I can endure. I must get away. There is one other thing; I know something of what Harris Haynes did for you." He spoke more gently, looking with a wistful respect at the grave. "Now that he has gone, you must not let that make any difference in your opportunities. You must go on as you were; your music, your studies."

The girl made a little gesture of refusal. They walked toward the house in silence, for a time. Then Everard spoke again.

"Yet that is what he would have wished. I know that you haven't the money to do this." Dick, having a gift of silence, had said nothing of Haynes' bequest. "I have more than I can use. I know I can't give it to you outright. But I can give it to Mr. Johnston. Or, if you can't take it from me, you could from my family. It wouldn't mean anything; it wouldn't bind you to the slightest thing. Oh, Helga, dear, let me do that much for you!"

"Only one man can have the right to do that," she said, hardly above a whisper.

"He is gone," said Everard, not comprehending. "I cannot fill his place, except this one, poor way."

"No," she said. From her bosom she drew out a note and handed it to him.

"From mother!" he cried. "To you!"

It was the letter of a worldly but kind-natured and essentially sound-hearted woman, an appeal for a deeply-loved son. "That's Dick's work," said the young man fondly, after running through it. "And it comes too late! *Does* it come too late, Helga?"

"If I only knew what was right," said the girl. "If only Petit Père was here to tell me!"

"Do you mean that you didn't care for him that way?" cried Everard. "Helga, do you mean that I had my chance? Is there still--"

They had come around the corner of the piazza, and there sat Dick Colton, tipped back on two legs of his chair. Hc rose quickly and made for the door. Helga called him back, and spoke brokenly:

"You must write to your mother. I cannot yet. Oh, if I only dared be happy!" she wailed. "I know how strongly Petit Père felt against him, against your family. I could not--"

"Helga," said Dick, catching her hands in his. "Listen, little girl, little sister. Haynes made me one of his trustees for you. Do you know why? Because he trusted me. Will you trust me too?"

Helga's tear-stained eyes looked into his. "Who would not?" she said.

"He left this charge in my honour: 'Use your influence to guard her against marrying under circumstances that you would not approve for the woman you loved best in the world.' With that charge upon me I solemnly tell you that you may come to us as with Harris Haynes' blessing!"

He put her hand in Everard's, and disappeared through the door. The next instant, Miss Dolly Ravenden, a heap of indignant fluff, was frowning at him from the wall against which she had staggered.

"What a way to come in!" she cried. "You bear! You--you untamed locomotive! Is anything chasing you?"

Impulse wild and unreckoning upleaped in the heart of Dick Colton then and there. Without a struggle he gave way to it.

Swinging her up in his powerful arms, he set her upon her feet, and bending, kissed her most emphatically upon the lips. Then he went upstairs in two bounds, saying at the first bound:

"Good Lord! Now I have ruined myself." And at the second: "It was her own fault."

And while he was making his Adamite excuse, Miss Ravenden, red, confused, and annoyed because she couldn't seem to be properly angry, had walked out upon Helga sobbing in Everard's arms.

"Ah," she said thoughtfully, as she effected a masterly retreat, "it's in the air to-day."

Chapter Nineteen

The Lone Survivor

Sleep lay heavy and sweet upon Dick Colton that night. Not even the excitement of the prospective man-hunt--for the juggler was to be rounded up on the morrow--could overcome his healthy weariness. The intense and tragic events amid which his life had moved for a fortnight had been a cure for his insomnia as effectual as unexpected. Now when he slept, he slept; great guns could not wake him. In fact, at this particular midnight of September's last day great guns did not wake him, for the intermittent booming of cannonade for some fifteen minutes had left his happy dreams undisturbed.

Not so with the others. Helga was stirring below; the Ravendens were moving about in their respective rooms. Everard was delivering a passionate rhapsody to an elusive match-box, and Mrs. Johnston was addressing the familiar argument regarding the preventive merits of rubber boots to her exasperated husband. Into the submerged consciousness of Dick Colton drifted scraps and fragments of eager talk. "Wreck ashore.... Graveyard Point again.... Won't need the lanterns.... Drat the rubber boots!... All go together."

Then said the wizard of dreams, who mismanages such things, to Dick Colton: "It was all a phantasy, the imaginings of a moment. The crowded wonders in which you have taken part never happened. There have been no murders; there has been no juggler, no kite-flyer, no mystery. Haynes is alive; you can hear him moving about. You are back where you belong, at the night of the shipwreck, and I have befooled you well with an empty panorama."

"And Dolly?" cried the unhappy dreamer in such a pang of protest that he came broad awake at once. The wizard fled.

From below, the magic of Helga's voice rang out, sounding once more, as he had not heard it since Haynes' death, the vital ring of unconquerable youth, but with a new and deeper undertone.

"Oh-ho! Yo-ho-ho, Everard! Come down! There's a wreck ashore!"

And the quick answer: "All right! Be with you in a minute."

Once more Dick's mind swung back. All was so exactly parallel to the first night he had spent there. But the next instant he was plunging into what garments came readiest to hand. Out into the hall he bolted and came upon Dolly Ravenden and her father so sharply that for a moment his conscience was in abeyance; then, stricken with the recollection of his moment's madness, he turned away to Everard's door and caught that impulsive youth's charge full in the chest.

"You up, Dicky?" cried the younger brother. "And Dolly, too! We'll have a wreck party?"

"I wouldn't take it too much as an entertainment, Ev," said his brother quietly.

"Of course! What a brute I am!" cried Everard contritely. "Not having been here for the other wreck, I forgot all that it brought about. You going with Dolly?"

"I think I'll go with you and Helga," said Dick.

"You needn't," returned the other so promptly that Dick laughed aloud. "Oh, of course, we'll be glad to have you," he continued hastily, "only thought you mean--"

"Never mind, old man. We'll probably all be together."

The Ravendens, Helga, her father, and the two Coltons went out together into a night of moonlit glory. A flying cloud-fleet, sailing homeward to port in the eastern heavens, dappled the far-stretched landscape with shadows. The air was keen and clear, with an electrifying quality that made the blood bound faster. Dick felt a wild, inexplicable elation, as if some climax of life were promised by this marvel of the night's beauty.

His eager glance quested for Dolly. Her eyes met his, and she turned away to her father. Yet there was no anger in her mien: rather a soft confusion and a certain pathetic timidity as she put her hand on Professor Ravenden's arm, that made Dick's heart jump. But when he would have gone to her she shrank; and the lover, divining something of her unexpressed plea, turned away to lead the little procession. Once he dropped back to speak to Helga, fearing for the effect of the excitement and the fresh pang of recollection upon her. Like two trustful children, she and Everard were swinging along, hand in hand. The girl's eyes were wet with tears, but there was an exaltation in her face as she looked at her companion that brought a lump into Dick's throat.

"Ev," he said in his brother's ear, "if you aren't all that a man could be to her to your last breath, you'll have me to reckon with!"

The younger man looked at him with shining eyes: "Loyal old Dick!" he said, and laughed unsteadily. "May the gods be as good to you!"

Having reached the cliff summit, the little party had full view of the wreck. In reality it was not a wreck at all: the steamer lay easily on the sand to the west of Graveyard Point, solidly wedged and in no apparent danger. After one long contemplation of the ship and a brief glance at the bright sky, the veteran Johnston delivered himself of his opinion:

"Captain drunk. Mate drunk. Lookout blind drunk. Crew rum-soaked. Cook boiled, and ship's cat paralysed. It's the only way they could 'a' got her ashore a night like this. And they're as safe with this wind as if they were in dry-dock."

He went down to the beach to join the coast-guards, whose surf-boat was just returning from the ship, and presently brought the report back to his party in the triumph of corroboration.

"Guess I was about right, except as to the cat," he said. "They ain't got any cat aboard; it's a parrot. We might as well go along home."

Before the little party had covered one-third of the distance, Dick Colton, profiting by Johnston's momentary engagement of Professor Ravenden's attention, moved over to Dolly.

"I don't know what you will think of me," he began in a low tone. "I never meant to. It was a moment's overwhelming folly. Will you forgive me?"

Seemingly the girl paid no attention. Her gaze was fixed on a knoll which rose in front of them.

"Dolly," implored the young man, "don't think too harshly of me for a moment's rashness."

"Look!" said the girl. "Did you see that?"

"Where? What was it?"

"On that hill almost in front of us. What is a man doing there at this time?"

"The juggler!" exclaimed Dick.

"Yes, I think it was. There! See him moving just under the brow?"

A dark figure travelling low and swift, as of a man doubled over, could be discerned faintly against the waving grasses to the north. A moment more and it disappeared.

The landscape which they overlooked was one of the most broken stretches on all Montauk. It was like an Indian-mound burial-place hugely magnified, with thick patches of vegetation scattered between the mounds. Despite the difficulties of the situation, Dick's mind was made up at once. They must capture the juggler.

"Ev! Professor! Mr. Johnston!" he called.

The others hurried to him; there was no mistaking the anxiety in his voice.

"Miss Ravenden has just seen a man coming toward us over the downs," he explained rapidly. "I think it is the juggler. We must get him. Which of you have pistols?"

"Just my luck! I left mine home," groaned Everard.

"Although I have no firearms, the loaded butt of my capturing net is not a despicable weapon," said Professor Ravenden, brandishing it scientifically.

Johnston produced a revolver. His own weapon Dick handed to Professor Ravenden, saying:

"I'll trade for your loaded club. You're the best shot of us, Professor. Please stay here and guard the girls. Ev, you go to the west along that ridge and keep a sharp lookout. Don't let him get near enough to throw his knife, but draw him that way if you can. Mr. Johnston, take the east. Don't shoot unless he attacks you or I call for help. I'll go down the ravine and stop him."

Dolly Ravenden started forward.

"Oh, please!" she said tremulously. "Not without a pistol. Oh, Dick!"

"I will be careful," he said gently, and leaning toward her for the briefest moment: "My darling, oh, my darling!"

Then he was gone. With a business-like air Professor Ravenden examined the weapon Dick had given him, and placed himself in front of the girls. To the east they could see Johnston's sturdy form, and westward Helga's brooding eyes now and again glimpsed the buoyant figure of her lover.

"Don't be afraid, dearest," he had called back to her. "When it comes to running I can do just as well as the next fellow, and generally better."

Shadows and patches of oak covered Dick's course. Five minutes passed, and then came a shout from Johnston. Professor Ravenden walked coolly forward a few paces, raising and lowering his pistol arm as if to make sure that it was well oiled at the joints. At rest it pointed in the direction of Whalley. The juggler was running toward them from the side of the ravine down which Dick had moved. Taking advantage of the land's broken contour, he had eluded and passed Dick; now he was making straight for them.

"Stand!" called the professor.

It was as if he had not spoken. The juggler approached with no lessening of pace, no swerve from his course.

"Don't come any farther. Do you want to be shot?"

This time it was Helga's voice. Whalley checked his rush. His hands clutched at his breast; he strove for utterance against an agonised exhaustion. His arms beating out into the air expressed with shocking vividness a warning of extremest terror. Obviously there was nothing to fear from the man in this mood. Nevertheless, Professor Ravenden held his pistol ready as he went forward.

"Take her--away!" he backed out like a man fighting for utterance in the last stage of strangulation. "Eet--comes. I--haf--seen--eet!"

"Compose yourself, my man," soothed the professor. "Be calm and explain what has so alarmed you."

But the juggler only flung up his arms in a wild gesture toward the sky, and dropped.

"We must call in the others," said Professor Ravenden.

Helga lifted her head and sent her clear and beautiful call rolling across the hills. At the sound the juggler crawled to her feet and brokenly begged her to keep silence. Before they could win an explanation from him Everard's tall figure came speeding down the hillside, and only half a minute later Dick's great bulk toiled up through the ravine. Johnston came in last. No sooner had Dick set eyes on the juggler than he advanced upon him.

"You are our prisoner," he said. "Professor, is he armed?"

"I have not ascertained. He is suffering from an access of unmanning terror, and I believe is not formidable."

"Anyway," said Dick, "we had best--"

He broke off as the juggler drew from his belt one of his huge, broad-bladed knives, which he doubtless had cached on the point before his capture.

"Cover him, professor," cried Dick.

"Do not tak eet away," begged the man. "We will need eet. I bring eet, for her." He turned the dog-like adoration of his eyes upon Helga. "She safe my life; I die for her."

"What the deuce is he talking about?" growled Everard.

"When I hear ze gun of ze sheepwreck, somesing tell me she weel come out. I run here an'," a strong shudder racked him, "I see eet."

"That's all very well," said Dick sternly. "But you must come with us."

"Afterward! afterward!" cried the man in an agony of supplication. "Now we hide, teel eet go. Zen I gif you ze knife. Anysing after we make her safe before ze death strike her."

"This is not all lunacy," said Dolly Ravenden quickly. "There is some danger he is trying to warn us from."

Whirling upon her, the wretched juggler threw out his arms in an eloquent gesture.

"You will believe! I am murderer, zey say. So! Yet I come an' give up to safe her. Is zere not somesing?"

"Anyway, you've got to give up that knife," said Dick.

Tigerish lines came out on the man's face. "Fools!" he snarled and leaped back, a dangerous animal once more. Again the professor's gun came up.

"Shoot him!" cried Dick.

"I can't shoot him in cold blood!" protested the professor

Slowly Everard moved up from the other side. In a moment the test must have come, when a sound between a gasp and a moan turned every face toward Johnston.

"Great God of Wonders!" whispered the old man, and pointed in the face of the glowing moon. One after another the little group turned, caught the vision, and were stricken motionless.

Far in the radiant void, at a distance immeasurable to the estimate, soared terrifically an unknown creature. Its wings, spreading over a huge expanse, bore up with unimaginable lightness a bloated and misshapen body. From a neck that writhed hideously, as a serpent in pain, wavered a knobbed head, terminating in a great bladed beak. With slow sweep it described majestic circles. Always the waving head gave the impression of hopeless search. It was like a foul and monstrous gnat buzzing in futile endeavour at the pale-lit window of the infinite. Suddenly it fell, plunging headlong, then over and over, like a tumbler pigeon, miles and miles, so it seemed, through the empty air, only to bring up with a turn that carried it just above the sea, in a ghastly and horrid playfulness.

The little human creatures far below followed with awful eyes. Not until a low-scudding cloud blotted the portent from sight did the power of speech and coherent thought return. Then, each according to his own way, they bore themselves in the face of a terror such as no creature of human kind ever before had confronted. Professor Ravenden, holding an envelope on his knee, burrowed fiercely for a pencil muttering:

"Gyrations comprising three distinct turns. Most amazing. New light upon the entire race of flying reptiles. I must preserve my calm; surely I must preserve my calm!"

Dolly Ravenden was looking at Dick with her soul in her eyes.

Old Johnston, fallen to his knees, was praying with the formal steadfastness of the blue Long Island Presbyterian.

Everard crossed to Helga, who was pale but quiet, and threw his arm around her. She leaned against him and gazed into the sky. Dick wrenched his hungry eyes from Dolly and turned a face absolutely white and absolutely set to Professor Ravenden.

"The pteranodon!" he said.

"Yes. Oh, what an opportunity! What an enlightenment to science! To no observer has it been given since the beginning of the race. May I trouble you for a pencil?"

"Then it was this creature," said Dick, "that killed Petersen the sailor, and the sheep. It fouled Ely's kites and snapped the strong cord as if with scissors. It impaled Ely on its beak, carried him aloft and shook him to earth again. It made the footprints which Whalley--"

"Eet will come back!" shrieked the little juggler, who had been speechless with terror. "Eet will kill you all! Zat is not matter. But her! Eet shall not kill her while I leef! Eet see ze kite man, an' I see it come down, an' I

run. See! Ze moon!"

From behind the clouds the moon moved again, and now they saw the reptile swaying back toward them. Of a sudden it uttered a harsh, grating sound and passed.

"That is what I heard just before my horse bucked," said Everard.

"Raucous--metallic," said the professor in rapt tones. "Sounded twice--or was it three times?" He looked up from his notes, questioning the group.

Again the hideous sound was borne to their ears as the monster whirled and soared downward, in a long slanting line.

"It has sighted us!" said Dick. "Dolly! Helga! Run for the gully. Find what cover you can. Ev, go with them."

Helga reached out her hand. "Come, Dolly," she said.

For one moment the girl hesitated. Then, with a little wail of love and dread, she leaped to Dick and clung close to him, pressing her lips upon his.

"Now you know!" she sobbed. "Whatever happens, you know! I could not leave you so, without--"

"God bless and keep you, my own!" said Dick, thrusting her from him into his brother's grasp. "Quick, Ev! It's coming!"

With another metallic cry, the pteranodon increased its speed in a wide, dropping curve. Instantly Dick became the man of action again.

"Professor, I want you with your pistol on the right. Ev, stand by the gully and guard the girls. Johnston, take the left; don't fire until it is close. Fire for the head."

"For the wing-joint where it meets the body, if you will allow me," amended the scientist, putting away his notes carefully in his pocket.

"Thank you. For the wing-joint," said Dick coolly. "If it strikes, throw yourselves on the ground, all of you. Look out for the beak. Whalley, give me your knife."

"I keep eet," returned the little juggler. He had regained his courage now, and with an intelligent eye had stationed himself on a hummock above the depression whither Everard had guarded the two women. "What can you do wiz eet? But me, I show you! Now come ze death-bird!"

"That's all right then," said Dick approvingly. "Remember, Whalley, whatever happens, you are to save the ladies."

Throwing off his coat, he swung the heavy net-butt in the air, and stationed himself.

"If it tackles me first," thought he, "the pistol shots may do the business, while I check it."

Yet, beholding the terrific size and power of the tiger of the air, it seemed impossible that any agency of man might cope with it. That it meant an attack was obvious; for while Dick was disposing his little force it had been circling, perhaps two hundred yards above, choosing the point for the onslaught.

Now it rushed down; not at Dick, but from the opposite quarter. All ran in that direction. The pteranodon rose, sounding its raucous croak as if in mockery. Before they had regained their position, it had whirled, and was plunging with the speed of an express train down the aerial slope directly upon Dick. Straight for his heart aimed the great bayonet that the creature carried for a bill.

Dick stood braced. The heavy, leaded club swung high. The creature was almost upon him when he leaped to one side, and brought his weapon around. The next instant he lay stunned and bleeding from the impact of the piston-rod wing.

The reptile swerved slightly. Shouting aloud, Professor Ravenden poured the six bullets from his revolver into the great body. From the other side Johnston was shooting. The monster was apparently unaffected, for it skimmed along toward the spot where the girls crouched, guarded by Everard Colton, who held ready a small boulder, his only weapon.

But between stood "The Wonderful Whalley" with knife poised. On came the reptile. Like a bow, the little juggler bent backward until his knife almost touched the ground behind him. Then it swung, flashed, and went home as the pteranodon, with a foot of steel driven into its hideous neck, pierced the man through and through, and rising, shook the limp body from its beak.

The air was poisoned with the reek of the great saurian. Sharp to the left it turned, made a half-circle and, beating the air with the thunder-strokes of sails flapping loose in a mighty wind, fell to the ground ten paces from Professor Ravenden.

Instantly that intrepid scientist was upon it, with clubbed revolver, everything forgot except the hope of capturing such a prize. Everard, holding aloft his rock, sprinted to the rescue. Dick staggered after him. They had almost reached the spot when the reptile's dying agony began.

The first wing-beat hurled Professor Ravenden headlong with a broken collar-bone. Frenzied and unseeing, the monster of the dead centuries projected itself from the hill, and with one dreadful scream that might have rung from the agonised depths of hades, sped out across the waters. Once, twice, thrice, and again, the vast pinions beat; then a plunge, a whirl, a wild maelstrom of foam far out at sea--and quiet.

Dolly Ravenden, with a cry, ran to her father, and with the help of Dick and old Johnston got him to his feet.

"A boat! A boat!" he cried. "We must pursue it!"

Then he tried to lift his arm, and all but fainted.

Meantime Helga and Everard were bending over the juggler. He was dead as instantly as Haynes had been dead by his stroke.

"Poor fellow!" said the young man. "He has paid his debt as best he could. It was his knife that saved us, my Helga."

The girl said nothing, but she loosed the soft neckerchief that she wore and covered the worn, fantastic and peaceful face. They stood with clasped hands looking at the body when a loud cry from Professor Ravenden brought them hurriedly to where he stood, frenziedly gesturing toward the sea.

About the spot where the pteranodon had fallen glittered little flashes of phosphorescence. Soon the sea was furiously alight. A school of dogfish had found the prey. One great black wing was thrust aloft for a brief moment. The water bubbled and darkened--and the sons of men had seen the last of the lone survival that had come out of the mysterious void, bearing on its wings across the uncounted eons, joy and sorrow, love and

death.