Т. С. БРИДЖЕС
MARTIN CRUSOE
A BOY’S ADVENTURE ON WIZARD ISLAND

I. THE MYSTERIOUS MESSAGES

With the telephones of his wireless fixed over his ears, a pencil in his hand, and a writing-pad before him, Martin Vaile sat listening to the signals that came through.

Some minutes passed, and Martin, tapping idly on the paper with his pencil, seemed little interested in the sounds. Then suddenly his attitude changed, his back straightened, and a look of eager interest lit his keen gray eyes.

His pencil began to work, and he rapidly jotted down a series of figures and letters on the paper.

Then he stopped writing and sat waiting, but nothing more came, and, glancing at his watch, he noted the time, slipped off the receiver, and ran his fingers through his close, curly hair.

The door of the big room opened, and a boy came quickly in, a boy about Martin's age, but as dark and slight as Martin was tall and fair.

"That you, Basil?" said Martin quickly. "I'm glad you've come."

Basil Loring gave the other a quick glance.

"What's the matter, old man?" he asked lightly. "Why this frown on your marble brow? What horrible news have you been absorbing out of space?"

"Nothing horrible, Basil, but something most unthinkably baffling. I've just had the sixth message from the unknown sender."

"The sixth message?" repeated Basil, looking puzzled. "What in the name of sense are you talking about?"

"Oh, I forgot. You've not been here for a week, and don't know anything about it. Well, every night for six nights past I have had a message from this unknown station. It gives the latitude and longitude, and says *'Help! Come to me!'*"

"Sounds like an S.O.S., Martin. Is it a ship in trouble?"

"Bless you, no. Nothing of the sort. This is from a much more powerful installation than any ship has. Besides, it isn't a ship. The tuning is different."

“That’s Greek to me,” said Basil. “Explain.”

“Well, you know we use different length waves for wireless work, and ships use comparatively short waves. By adjusting my apparatus, I can cut those out completely, so that all I catch is from the giant land stations such as the Eiffel Tower or Washington. Their wavelengths are much greater, and cannot be heard with the ordinary adjustment. The other night, as an experiment, I tried an even wider adjustment, and then came this mysterious message, or, rather, the duplicate of it; and each night since, just at the same hour, it has come again. As I told you, this is the sixth.”

Basil stared. “I understand about the waves,” he said. “But surely, Martin, if this is a big station that you are hearing from, it’s easy enough to find where it is! All the big stations are known, aren’t they?”

“This one isn’t,” Martin answered. “I can tell you this much: if the sender states his position correctly, it’s right in the middle of the sea.”

This time Basil was startled.

“If that’s the case, it must be from a ship. And yet you say that it’s from a big installation.”

Suddenly his face cleared. “Tell you what, Martin, it’s someone having a joke with you—some fellow in one of the other big stations playing a game.”

Martin shook his head decidedly.

“It’s not that, Basil. The message does come from the spot it is supposed to come from, or from that neighborhood. You see, nowadays, we are able to tell pretty accurately the direction of wireless signals. I have made experiments during the past week, and, as far as I can gather, the station is exactly where the sender says it is.”

“Then there must be an island there,” said Basil.

“If there is, it is not on my map, and, mind you, I have looked up the best government charts.”

Basil shook his head helplessly.

“It’s beyond me, Martin,” he said. “Show me the spot on the map.”

Martin took a chart out of a drawer and unrolled it. It represented that vast tract of the North Atlantic Ocean between the Canary Islands and the Bermudas, between twenty and thirty degrees north. Near the center of this, but a little to the west, Martin had made a tiny cross in pencil.

“There’s the spot,” he said.

Basil looked at it for some moments. “Why,” he said slowly, “that’s in the Sargasso Sea.”

Martin nodded.

“Exactly. It is right in the center of that tremendous plain of weed which is drifted by circling currents into that dead water, and covers more than a million square miles. That is where the mysterious island must be, and that is the spot from which these queerly-tuned messages must be reaching me.”

Basil stared first at the map and then at Martin.

“If the island is not charted, the only reason can be that the weed has prevented ships from getting to it,” he said. “And if ships can’t get to it, how in the name of sense has this fellow got there? And if he has got there, how did he ever get his wireless there, or put it up?”

“Just the questions I have been asking myself, Basil, and just the questions I mean to solve before I am very much older. I hope to be on that island within a month.”

“You’re going there?” cried Basil. “But how? Of course, you have the yacht, but she can’t travel through the weed any more than any other ship.”

“True, my boy. But if one can’t travel through the weed the other way is to travel over it.”

Basil’s eyes shone.

“A ’plane!” he said breathlessly.

“I shall take the *Bat*, Basil. She will do the trick if anything will. A flying boat ought to be the very thing for the Sargasso.”

Basil drew a long breath.

“Bully!” he said. “Oh, Martin, I wish I could come with you!”

“I wish you could, Basil,” replied Martin gravely; “but I’m afraid it’s out of the question. You’ve got to go back for your last term at ‘prep.’ school. In any case, your father would not hear of it.”

“What about yours?” questioned Basil, quickly.

“I am wiring him tomorrow,” Martin answered.

Twenty-four hours later Martin stood on the wide-stretching lawn. The stately house lay behind him; in front the Atlantic sparkled under the spring sun, and in the cove below lay the *Flying Fox*, a magnificent ocean-going craft of twelve hundred tons, in which Martin and his father had traveled thousands of miles across the seas of all the world. Martin’s father was a very rich man, whose business interests lay in many countries.

The boy's eyes were on the drive. He was expecting the telegraph boy, with the answer to the message he had sent the previous day to his father, who was in Florida attending to one of the great land settlement projects he and his partner, Morton Willard, had started there.

A boy on a bicycle came up the distant drive, and Martin walked quickly down the slope to meet him.

"Telegram for you, sir," said the lad.

"Thanks," answered Martin with a smile.

"Dad is prompt," he said. "I hardly hoped to hear today."

He tore the envelope open, unfolded the flimsy sheet, and read the message.

The color faded from his face; his eyes went blank; he staggered and fell on the grassy bank. The slip fell from his shaking fingers.

Then, with a big effort, he pulled himself together, and, picking up the telegram, forced himself to read it again. This was the message:

> DEEPLY REGRET TO INFORM YOU YOUR FATHER DIED SUDDENLY TODAY RESULT OF HEART FAILURE. AM MAKING ALL ARRANGEMENTS FOR FUNERAL AND WRITING BY THIS MAIL. WILLARD, SEMINOLE HOTEL, LACOOCHEE, FLORIDA.

"Dead! My father dead!" groaned poor Martin.

The shock was terrible, for Martin's mother had died when he was only a baby, and he and his father had been the greatest chums imaginable.

And now his father had died, hundreds of miles from home, without a last word!

For many minutes Martin sat there, staring blankly in front of him, but with his mind's eyes fixed on his father's face as he had last seen him, barely a month before. When at last he rose and went to the house he looked five years older than when he had left it.

How the next days passed Martin hardly knew. Everyone was as kind as could be, but he was in a dazed state and hardly knew what was happening around him.

What roused him at last was a visit from the family lawyer, Mr. Vincent Meldrum. He arrived with a bag full of papers and a very grave

face. They met in the library, an oak-paneled room full of Mr. Harrington Vaile's books.

"Martin," began Mr. Meldrum, "I am going to tell you at once that I have bad news for you."

"It can't be any worse than I have had already," said poor Martin. "You needn't be afraid to tell me."

The lawyer looked at Martin and sighed.

"Martin," he said, "I have known you from a child, and I believe you have plenty of pluck. You will need it all, I fear. Having said that, I will not keep you in suspense. The big land scheme at Cleansand Bay has come to utter smash and the papers are saying it was a swindle from the beginning."

Martin leaped to his feet.

"A swindle! Who accuses my father of having anything to do with a swindle?"

"Steady, Martin—steady!" begged the lawyer. "You and I know better, but others do not. I fear there is no doubt about the swindle; but your father did not know this. He took Mr. Willard's word that the scheme was sound. Willard ran the whole thing, and, as you will remember, kept your father away from Florida on one excuse or another until quite lately."

Again Martin sprang to his feet.

"Then he murdered my father!" he cried fiercely.

Mr. Meldrum raised his hand.

"You must not make rash accusations, Martin," he said gravely. "There is no suspicion, let alone proof, that Mr. Willard did anything of the kind: in any case your father's heart was said to be weak."

"Then it was the shock that killed him," declared Martin; "the shock of finding that he was mixed up in a swindle."

"That is possible," replied the lawyer. "Now listen, Martin. This is a bad business. The loss to the investors runs into an enormous sum. I fear that all your father's property will be seized to pay the debt. There is this much comfort. The courts cannot touch the money you have under your mother's will, so you will have a small but sufficient income to—"

Martin broke in with a quick question.

"Is my father's money enough to satisfy the creditors?"

"I doubt it, Martin."

"Then you will take every penny, Mr. Meldrum—every penny, do you hear? Sell the house, the yacht—everything. Do you think I would let

anyone say that my dad had swindled them?”

II. THE GREAT ADVENTURE BEGINS

"You're going to the island, Martin?"

"I'm going, Basil."

"But—but what does old Meldrum say?"

"He doesn't know, Basil. He thinks I am going to Florida. So I am, for the matter of that, but I mean to visit the island first. You see, it all fits in perfectly. The people who have bought the *Flying Fox* want her delivered at Havana. So I may just as well go in her as not. And the *Bat* is my own. I paid for her out of my own allowance, and I feel justified in keeping her. I have told Captain Anson, of the *Flying Fox*, just what I want to do, and he has agreed. You are the only other person who knows about it."

Basil looked worried.

"I almost wish you hadn't told me. Suppose you come to grief?"

"If I do there's no one to miss me except you, old friend," said Martin, gently. "But don't be upset. There's no reason why I should come to harm. The island is not more than two hundred and fifty miles from the edge of the weed, and the *Bat* will cover that distance in two hours."

"Yes; but suppose you get there and can't get away again?"

"I don't see how that can be, unless I smash up the *Bat*, and if I do there's always the wireless with which I can call for help."

"I'd forgotten the wireless," said Basil. "Yes, you can do that."

He paused.

"But I say, Martin," he went on, rather doubtfully. "I thought your idea was to get square with Willard!"

Martin's face hardened.

"That is exactly what I do mean to do," he said sternly. "I shall never rest until he is punished—until all those poor people who have lost their money through him have been repaid to the last penny. But don't you see that this delay may help? At present Willard is on his guard. He will be looking out for me, and is sure to know that I am starting for Florida. If I disappear on the way he will think the danger is over. He won't worry. Then, when he has forgotten, I shall swoop down on him."

Martin's eyes were shining. Basil stared at him in wonder.

"You'll get him all right, I feel sure of that," he declared. "Besides, I daresay you'll make a fortune on the island. A man who has a great wireless like that must be awfully rich."

"I had thought of that," said Martin. "And I shall want money to tackle this swindler Willard. The messages make it quite plain that someone is wanted there, on the island, and if whoever is there will pay for my help, why, I sha'n't refuse the money. And now, good-by, Basil. Keep a still tongue, and I will promise you shall hear from me as soon as possible."

"Good-by, Martin!" said Basil, in a voice not very steady. "And just remember, if you are in a hole, I'll do anything on earth that I can!"

"I know you will," Martin answered, as he wrung his friend's hand. "Good-by again. I go aboard to-night, and we sail first thing in the morning."

Basil left, and Martin finished his packing. Two hours later he went aboard the yacht. At five next morning he was on deck. He stood alone in the stern, taking his last look at the beautiful old house with its wide, smooth lawns, and the tall trees behind with the rooks cawing in the branches.

The yacht swung southward around a tall headland, cutting off the view.

The *Flying Fox* traveling at a steady seventeen knots ran rapidly into the tropics and a week later lay rolling idly on the silken swells of mid-Atlantic. It was a heavenly day, the warm air soaked with sun.

To the north the sea lay open to the farthest horizon, but the view to the south was bounded by a dark line which at first sight resembled a low-lying shoal, but which was actually the edge of the monstrous mass of weed covering the Sargasso Sea.

Alongside the yacht, attached to a long spar which projected well beyond her side, lay Martin Vaile's big flying boat, the *Bat*, and on the deck of the ship Martin himself, in the thick overalls of a pilot, stood exchanging a last few words with bluff old Captain Anson.

"This is for Mr. Meldrum, captain," said Martin, handing him a letter. "But mind, I don't want him to have it until you get home again. Long before then you will have heard from me."

"I hope so, I'm sure, Martin," replied the captain, who was frowning uncomfortably.

“Oh, you’ll hear all right,” declared Martin with a smile. “I have told you there is wireless on the island.”

“Ay, if there is an island at all,” grumbled the skipper.

“There must be an island, or there wouldn’t be wireless,” insisted Martin.

“And suppose there is an island?” burst out the captain. “And suppose you reach it, what are you going to do when you get there? How do you know this fellow that has sent the message will let you get away again? Suppose you tumble into trouble, how are we going to help you? Just remember this is as close as any ship can get to this unknown land. Let me tell you, Martin, if your good father was still alive he’d never have let you go off on a wild-goose chase like this.”

“But he is not alive,” said Martin, sadly. “And even if he were I don’t think he would forbid me, captain. Remember this, my only objects in life are to clear his memory and to punish this man Willard. As I have told you already, I must have money for both these purposes. I firmly believe that what I am going to do will be my quickest and best way to make the necessary money. And, quite apart from all that, the man on the island wants help, and I feel that it’s up to me to bring it. Now, don’t try to discourage me,” he went on quietly. “My mind is made up. Let me feel that I have your good wishes, captain. I’m sure I shall need them.”

“Certainly you have them, my lad,” said the captain warmly, “and the good wishes of all aboard. Well, I’ll say no more, except to wish you the best of luck. I hope you’ll come out of it safely, with all the cash you want, and I for one will be uncommon glad to see you safe back again.”

The two shook hands, then Martin went over the side and took his seat in the slim hull of the flying boat. The men above cast off, Martin pressed the button of the self-starter, the engines roared, and the *Bat* shot away from the side of the yacht. Sweeping up the side of one of the long, slow swells, she reached the smooth top, and, taking off like a sea-bird, rose bodily into the air.

Martin kept driving up and up, and as the needle of his barograph sank so did the mercury in the tube of the thermometer beside it. Above the instruments was his chart with the mark showing the exact position of the unknown island. He steered by compass, and kept the bows of his machine pointed almost precisely south.

Martin was a skilled pilot. He had been mad on aircraft even before he first went to school; and his father, realizing this, had started his training when he was only ten years old. His wealth had made it easy for him to give the boy the best teachers, and at seventeen. Martin was not only a first-class pilot and a certificated wireless operator, but he had a wider knowledge of general science, of electricity and of chemistry, than most men of double his age.

Having made sure that all was running right, Martin settled himself comfortably in his seat. Once in the air, a 'plane is far easier to handle than a motor-car. He was able to take it easy and to look about him.

Glancing downwards, he saw that he was already far from the open sea. Beneath him spread the brown mat of weed, stretching mile after mile in tangled masses.

Yet it was not all weed, for it was broken by lagoons of blue water. And, even at the height at which he sailed, he could see that these lagoons were full of life; the tropic sea seemed clear as blue glass, and he could see, far down in the depths, strange forms gliding at great speed. Once he noticed a huge whale, looking as if carved out of black rubber, in the act of broaching. In another pool he caught a glimpse of a monstrous tangle of twisted antennae, which he realized, with a shudder, must be one of the tremendous cuttles which are known to infest the tideless depths of the Sargasso.

Then he saw a ship. A sailing ship of large size she must have been, but her masts had gone overboard, leaving only the stumps; the cordage had rotted away, and she lay mouldering, lifeless, waiting until slow decay should cause her to sink into the hidden depths under the tangle which surrounded her.

He looked back. Very far to the north lay the blue line of open sea, and a tiny trail of smoke told where the *Flying Fox* steamed onwards to her destination. Martin shivered. After all, he was only seventeen, and he felt terribly alone.

This feeling soon passed. The interest of the scene enthralled him. For now he saw more ships, and he noticed that, the farther he got into the heart of the ocean jungle, the more ancient the type of vessel that lay within its festering tangles. Here was a galleon with a high poop-castle and quaintly curved bow, and a mile away a strange-looking ship which was like a picture he had seen of the *Great Harry*, a famous war vessel of the

sixteenth century. It seemed clear that either the weed area had been steadily increasing during the centuries or that some hidden current sucked the trapped ships deeper and deeper into the heart of the weed sea.

An hour had passed. It had seemed like five minutes. But he did not yet begin to strain his eyes for sight of the island, for he knew that he had still fully two hundred miles to go. And even the towering peak of Teneriffe is not visible more than a hundred miles out to sea.

Now he passed across a wide belt of open water which fairly teemed with marine life. Here was a school of cachalots, led by an old bull that must, Martin thought, be over a hundred feet in length. It came to him that this was where the whales had sought refuge from man's age-long persecution.

Another hour. Still the breeze held, still the sky was unsullied by a single cloud, and still his engines thundered in perfect rhythm.

Martin began to glance ahead. His heart was beating rapidly. At any minute he might sight the goal of his adventurous journey.

What was that? Was it a white cloud, or was it the gleam of a snow-capped peak hung high against the southern sky? Five minutes more, and Martin, half choked with excitement, knew that it was indeed a mountain. The island was no dream.

III. THE MYSTERIOUS ISLAND

Fifty minutes later, and the *Bat* was shooting like a meteor towards a vast dark mass of land surrounded by a wide belt of shining sea. Martin was near enough to see plainly the enormous cliffs and frowning precipices which bounded it.

The island was about twenty miles long and nearly as wide. In the centre rose a mountain with twin peaks white with snow, and from one of which a thin coil of smoke drifting lazily across the blue proclaimed it to be a volcano not yet extinct.

Here and there were patches of vivid green, but whether forest or bush, or merely grassland he was not yet near enough to see. To the west, so far away as to be merely a blur on the horizon, was what appeared to be another island.

As Martin drew nearer he was more and more impressed by the savage grandeur of the scenery. This was no coral island, but a great volcanic mass, clearly a survival of some continent long since whelmed in the depths of the sea.

He stared hard, but could see no sign of life upon the land. The only smoke was the faint curl from the tall peak. There was no sign of house or building nor, as far as he could see, of any cultivated land.

The next thing that struck him—and struck him very unpleasantly—was that there did not seem to be any place to make a landing. There was the sea, of course, but if he alighted on the sea he was faced with those enormous cliffs, up which there appeared to be no way of climbing. There was not a yard of beach anywhere. Even the deepest inlets seemed to be mere fiords faced with grim precipices.

Rising again, he circled higher, the roar of his engine coming back in rattling echoes from the wilderness of crags below. The higher he rose the less he liked the look of things. It seemed certain that he must either land upon the sea, or else turn and fly back to where he had come from.

Martin was one of those lucky people whose brains always work most quickly in an emergency, and like a flash it came to him that, even if

he could not see the nameless inhabitant of this mysterious island, it was probable that the other was aware of his approach. He remembered his wireless.

While it is still rare for any ’plane to carry a wireless sending installation, all the larger types of aircraft are fitted with receiving apparatus. It was the work of a moment to clap the telephones to ears and release the wire.

Instantly came the whistling notes in sequence, and presently he was reading out a message repeated time and time again:

“Pass twin peak to north. Land on lake beyond!”

Instantly obeying the order, he opened his throttle to its widest and went rushing round the shoulder of the northern peak. He gave it a wide berth. As it was, the hot air from below, mingling with the cold breath from the snow-capped heights, made wild eddies which swung his big ’plane giddily. But the giant power of his engines carried him safely through this peril and, sure enough, beyond and beneath lay the lake that the message had told of.

It was a mountain tarn, perhaps three miles long and a mile wide, and rimmed with precipices looking every bit as savage and inaccessible as the sea-cliffs themselves.

Yet Martin did not hesitate. He had every confidence in the mysterious guidance which had brought him so far, and, besides, he had no choice in the matter. Cutting out his engines, he glided down in a long, silent volplane, to land, light as a homing sea-bird, upon the dark surface of the lonely lake.

He had now been flying for more than four hours, and it was a relief to his tired nerves to release the controls and lie back a moment and look around him. The lake, as he had observed already, was long and narrow. It was evidently of enormous depth, and, from the black basalt cliffs which bordered it, he gathered that its bed must be the crater of an old fissure eruption.

Martin was not left long to consider his surroundings. All of a sudden the quick beat of a motor engine reached his ears, and, looking behind him, he saw a small launch shooting towards him at great speed. Where it came from he had not the slightest idea, for so far he had seen no possible landing-place. Yet there it was, and in the stern sat a man who steered his smart craft straight towards the flying boat.

Martin's heart throbbed with excitement. Here was the stranger who had called to him across all those thousands of miles of ocean.

Soon the launch was near enough for Martin to see the face and figure of the solitary steersman. The first thing of which Martin was conscious was that the stranger was a man of great height and magnificent physique, the second that he was old beyond belief.

His hair, still thick, was white as the ice-cap of the peak above, and so were his beard and mustache. The skin of his face was brown as parchment and seamed with a million wrinkles, and his cheekbones stood out prominent like those of a mummy. Yet his eyes were dark and piercing and there was still an air of power and strength about him, which was intensely impressive. Martin stared at him as though fascinated. He felt himself in the presence of an unusual personality.

The launch came alongside, and Martin found himself waiting breathlessly for the other to speak.

He had not long to wait. The white-haired giant raised his soft hat courteously.

"Welcome to Lost Island," he said in a deep voice. "My name is Julius Distin, and I wish to assure you that I am very grateful to you for coming to my help."

"I am Martin Vaile," Martin answered simply. "I consider myself very lucky to have been the one to pick up your message."

Julius Distin looked at Martin thoughtfully.

"You took it yourself?" he questioned quietly.

"Yes," replied Martin. "I was trying some extra wave lengths, and I just chanced on your signals."

Distin nodded. "The true spirit," he said. "You are young to have it. You are young, too, to have made such a flight unaided. So that is an aeroplane? I have never seen one."

Martin gasped. He could not say a word. The idea that this wonderful old man had never so much as set eyes upon an aeroplane struck him as the most amazing thing he had ever heard.

Distin smiled. "Yes, I have no doubt you are surprised. But it is nineteen years since I last visited the outer world. Still, the shape is familiar to me. I know of all the latest experiments, from the Wrights onwards."

"By your wireless, sir?"

"No, I have books."

Again Martin could only stare, and again the old man smiled. It was a pleasing smile, Martin thought.

"Wait a while," went on Distin. "I will tell you all about these things a little later on. But first we must get in. We have sharp storms here sometimes, and it would never do to risk this beautiful machine of yours. Give me your tow-rope."

"I can taxi in," said Martin.

"No, you must not waste your gasoline. I can tow you easily."

He took the rope, made it fast, restarted his engine, and turned back. As they neared the cliff on the north side of the lake, Martin saw a great rift open, a sort of fiord only a few yards wide, but very deep. The towering cliffs nearly met overhead. They passed straight down it, and as they went it grew narrower, until at last they were moving in deep gloom under an arch of rock resembling the aisle of a giant cathedral.

Distin stopped the launch.

"Here we are," he said; and Martin realized that they were floating in deep water at the foot of a low quay of rock. The old man rose to his feet and stepped out. There was the click of a switch, and Martin blinked in the dazzle of huge arc-lamps which shed a glare of white light over a monstrous staircase hewn in the living rock and stretching away up into the heart of the mountain.

Before Martin could recover from his astonishment, Distin stepped to one side and pulled over a lever. There came a sound like the fireproof curtain dropping in a theatre, and Martin saw a real curtain of metal bars descending behind them from the roof of the cave. It dropped to the water and below it.

Martin turned amazed eyes upon his guide.

"W-hat—" he began.

"We have our enemies," said the old man, gravely. "It is as well to be on the safe side."

Martin stared at his companion.

"Then you are not alone on the island," he said quickly. "There are natives?"

Professor Distin smiled.

"I am quite alone except for my servant Scipio and yourself," he answered. "The enemies I speak of come from that other island which you must have seen from your plane."

“The one to the west?”

“Yes. It is called Lemuria; it is much larger than this, and has a good many people upon it.”

“Who are they?” inquired Martin eagerly. “Caribs?”

“Oh, no! A much older race. To the best of my belief they are the survivors of the ancient Atlanteans, but they are not of pure blood. There is a Norse strain in them. I discovered this island from an old Norse chart.”

“A Norse chart?” repeated Martin, in astonishment.

“Yes; but, Mr. Vaile, I must not keep you standing here. We have very much to talk over, you and I, and I am sure you are tired and hungry. Come with me, and over supper I will tell you my story and hear yours.”

IV. THE PAINTED HALL

He led the way up the broad stone stairs. As Martin followed he was struck by the magnificent proportions of the great flight of stone steps, and the splendid arch of the rock overhead. It was clear that the whole was the work of man's hands. As for its age, that was incalculable. The steps were worn smooth as glass by the passage of thousands upon thousands of bare feet.

The staircase swung in a grand curve, and, reaching the top, Martin suddenly found himself in a vast pillared hall, hewn, like the stairs, in the living rock, and flooded with electric light. The walls, the pillars, the roof itself, were covered with an intricate mass of carvings representing birds, beasts and reptiles, many of them unknown to Martin. And these all glowed in wonderful colors as brilliant, apparently, as the day they were laid on.

Martin was struck dumb. He could do nothing but stand stock still and stare around him.

"Very wonderful, is it not?" said the old Professor. "The people from the Smithsonian Museum would give something to see this. See, here is the ichthyosaurus, the great fish lizard, and here is a dinosaur. Up on the roof above us are a flight of pterodactyls, the terrible flying lizard of the ancient days. You will find here representations of most of those giant animals which we know only from the fossilized bones we dig up; and here is proof positive that man—highly civilized man—lived cheek by jowl with all these marvellous beasts of earth's earlier days."

"It is wonderful," said Martin, in a whisper, "almost too wonderful."

"I shall show you even more wonderful things than this tomorrow," replied the Professor, in his quiet way. "But we do not live among these monsters, I am glad to say. Follow me."

Passing through the vast pillared hall, he took Martin through a curtain doorway into another cave. This was a spacious rock chamber with great windows facing on the lake—windows which were set with panes of plate glass, through which the afternoon sun shone pleasantly.

Martin was getting used to marvels. Yet the contrast between this room and the sculptured extravagance of the pillared hall was as startling as anything he had yet seen. White matting covered the floor, and the walls were hung with soft draperies. Here were big cane chairs, photographs, pictures, English furniture and quantities of books.

On the far side was a door leading into a second room furnished as a bedroom, and beyond were still more rooms.

"This was a rock gallery," explained Professor Distin. "We partitioned it off into rooms. Yours is the third; and when you are ready, come back to the sitting-room for supper."

Martin found sweet-smelling soap, warm water and clean towels. It was like his bedroom at home. When he came back a table was set, and a man of color in neat drill was just bringing a hot dish.

"Mr. Vaile," said the Professor, "this is Scipio Mack, the one survivor of those who came with me to Lost Island."

Scipio laid down his dishes.

"I'se mighty glad to see you, Marse Vaile," he said, showing his white teeth in a cheery grin. "As I done told de marster, he and me was getting plumb tired of one anoder's company. We're right pleased to welcome you, sah."

"Thank you very much, Scipio," replied Martin cordially.

He liked the look of the man as much as the master, and for the first time since the sudden death of his father began to feel a little less lonely and unhappy.

He soon found that the negro was a wonderful cook. Supper began with excellent grilled fish. It was pompano, the Professor explained. With it was served cassava, sweet potatoes and maize bread. Then came a salad made of avocado pears, the most delicious thing of the kind that Martin had ever tasted. Dessert was stewed guavas, custard apples, huge Bahia oranges and luscious mangosteens. They finished up with a cup of fragrant black coffee.

The Professor watched Martin eat, and smiled at his good appetite.

"Yes," he said. "We grow all this fruit ourselves. You shall see our garden to-morrow. It is in a hollow on the mountain side. I can get oranges into full bearing in three years."

Martin stared.

"How on earth do you do that, sir?"

“Electricity,” replied the Professor quietly. “I have made a study of electro-culture. Indeed, we do everything by electricity, including our cooking.”

“Where do you get your power?”

“Water—a glacier stream, fed by the snows above. It works my wireless also.”

“Then you have turbines,” said Martin, as he sipped his coffee.

“Oh, yes! We brought those with us.”

“But how?” began Martin, in fresh amazement.

“Quite simple, my boy. We came here in a submarine. There were two of us. Dr. Olaf Krieger, a Danish man of science, and myself were anxious to carry out certain experiments, and we wished to be quite undisturbed. Krieger it was who happened on the old Norse chart of which I have spoken. It seems clear that, in those days, the currents in the Atlantic were different, and that these islands were not so completely surrounded by weed as they are to- day. We resolved to come here. The question was how. Twenty years ago the submarine was still in its infancy; but I knew something of Mr. Holland’s experiments, and we built a submersible craft of about five hundred tons, called the *Saga*, which proved to be very successful. We collected seven good men, and, diving under the weed, reached the island successfully.”

He paused and a look of sadness clouded his fine old face.

“Of the original nine who set sail nineteen years ago, Scipio and myself are the only survivors.”

Martin waited breathlessly. The Professor went on:

“Two of us, Norton and Philips, were killed when the Lemurians first attacked us. Then Krieger, with three men, went back for fresh men and machinery. He returned in safety with a cargo of necessaries and two new men. They were good fellows, and we lived here very happily together, busy all day and every day, and keeping in touch with the outer world by means of our wireless. It is true we were attacked more than once, but with modern devices were able to keep even the fierce Lemurians at bay. All went well until, in 1914, the great war broke out. We heard the news with horror, for we foresaw the terrible nature of the struggle.”

“Doctor Krieger, believing that Denmark would be brought in, and aware that his scientific knowledge would be of great value to his country, decided to return and offer his services. He sailed, leaving Scipio, myself,

and a man named Caunter in charge. With our electric devices we were safe from the Lemurians, and he promised to send the *Saga* back at once."

"Alas, he never reached Denmark! From that day to this I have never heard a word of him or of the *Saga*. There is no doubt that they struck a mine or got entangled in one of the great steel nets set to catch under-water craft."

The Professor sighed again heavily. "For a long time I waited, hoping against hope for news. When at last I realized that it was hopeless, I realized also that we were completely cut off unless I called outside help. This I hesitated to do, for I could not, of course, tell who would answer, and I was afraid of the Germans catching my messages. Then came a new disaster. Caunter, fishing on the lake, was attacked by some monster of the depths; and, before we could help him, the boat was smashed and he was dragged down."

"What sort of beast?" asked Martin breathlessly.

"A manta—one of the great rays. The lake, I may tell you, is salt, and communicates with the sea by a narrow, winding passage, and strange creatures come in at times from the outer ocean."

"And so," continued the Professor, "I waited only until I knew the Germans were beaten, then I began to send out my messages, timing them so that only some experimentalist like yourself would be likely to catch them. And so you have come, and once more I beg to tell you how grateful I am."

Martin grew red.

"I don't deserve your thanks, sir," he answered bluntly. "I came as much for my own sake as yours."

"It's this way," he went on. "I have lost my father and everything else through the villainy of his partner, a man called Morton Willard. I want money to clear my father's name."

"Tell me," said the Professor.

Martin explained. He told the whole story of the Cleansand Bay swindle, and of how Morton Willard, himself the real culprit, had thrown the blame on Mr. Vaile, and after his death cleared out with the spoil of which he had robbed the unfortunate settlers.

"So you see, sir," ended Martin, "my chief object in life is to make sufficient to pay off every claim against my dear father and clear his name.

After that”—his face hardened as he spoke—“I propose to go after Willard.”

Professor Distin nodded.

“Your feelings do you credit, my boy, and, as far as in me lies, I will help you. I am not a rich man, for I spent most of my capital on the *Saga*, and though there are valuable minerals on this island, there is no gold. Yet there is gold in plenty not far away. Lemuria is full of it.”

Martin’s eyes glowed.

“How do you know?” he asked.

“From the Lemurians who invaded us. Wait. I will show you.”

He went across the room, and took down from the wall a heavy shield made of the hide of some unknown animal, and studded with great bosses of yellow metal.

“There is at least a couple of pounds’ weight of gold on that alone,” he said. “Their helmets, too, were covered with gold. It seems to be the only metal they have, except bronze. But they have pearls, too, for some of the men wore strings of them. The trouble will be, of course, to get hold of some of these valuables.”

Martin’s face fell.

“I had forgotten. No, of course we can’t,” he said dolefully.

“I am not so sure of that,” answered the Professor. “I am as anxious as you to visit Lemuria, for there must be much there of immense interest. These Lemurians, remember, belong to a race long extinct on the rest of the planet. I have of late made a plan for getting into communication with them.”

“My idea is,” continued the Professor, “to capture some of them, and to teach them by kindness. Once we master their language I believe we might make friends.”

“That is a splendid idea, sir!” cried Martin. “The one thing I don’t see is how we are going to catch them.”

“Wait till they visit us again. They come here about once a year. My own belief is that the painted cave is a sacred place to them, a sort of shrine of pilgrimage, and that they attack us simply because we keep them out of it.”

The two sat chatting together until past ten o’clock. Martin could have talked all night. He was too intensely interested to feel sleepy. It was the Professor who at last sent him off to bed.

The bed had a spring mattress and snowy sheets. Martin had hardly laid his head on the pillow before he was sound asleep. The next thing he knew someone was shaking him by the shoulder, and, opening his eyes drowsily, he saw the black face of Scipio bending over him. The man had a lighted candle in his hand.

"Yo' get up quick, Marse Vaile," he said, in a low voice. "Dar's trouble brewing."

"What's the matter?" inquired Martin sleepily.

"Dem fellers from de oder island. Dat's what de trouble is."

"An attack, you mean?"

"Dat's so, boss. I reckon dey seen yo' airyplane, an' dey come to find out what sort o' hoodoo yo' come to make. Dar dey are."

Martin sat up, broad awake now.

Through the breathless hush of the warm, dark night there came a strange low chanting, accompanied by the steady splash of oars.

V. THE GOLDEN GIANTS

“There ain’t no need to break your neck a-hurrying, Marse Martin,” suggested Scipio mildly. “Them folk ain’t a-going to git through the water gate, not in any sort of quick time.”

“There is no other way of getting in that I know of, Mr. Vaile,” said Professor Distin, who had just come into the room.

“Please don’t call me Mr. Vaile,” broke in Martin quickly.

“Very well, Martin,” answered the old gentleman, with a smile. “Now, if you are dressed, come with me. I will warrant you a sight such as few men have seen, something that will take you back a thousand years and more.”

He led the way into the big living-room. Here all was dark, and Martin stumbled against a chair.

“No lights,” explained the Professor. “It would not do. Although these windows are sixty feet above the lake, I would not give much for my glass if even a gleam of light were seen behind it.”

“What—they haven’t guns?”

“Hardly. They do not know what powder is. But they have slings and long bows. The slings are, no doubt, the old Atlantean weapons, and the bows they must have got from the Norsemen.”

“Now follow me,” he added. “Keep close, and do not on any account move away from me.”

“But don’t we want weapons?” asked Martin, in surprise.

“I have a pistol in my pocket, in case of emergency,” replied the other. “But the last thing I wish to do is to kill, or even injure, any of these people. We never have done so unless absolutely driven to it.”

“But you had a fight once. You told me you lost men.”

“Morton and Philips,” answered the Professor sadly. “The Lemurians got into the Painted Hall through a passage of which we did not know the existence. We had to kill seven of them in all.”

“But here is a weapon, if you want one,” continued the Professor, and he took down from the wall a great bronze battle-ax of which the handle

was banded with gold. “We took that from one of the dead men.”

Martin took it, and followed his guide out into the Painted Hall. Flashing his little light upon the bare rock floor, the Professor picked his way among the pillars to the head of the great stairway, but on reaching this he switched off the torch again, and took Martin by the hand.

“Not a sound,” he whispered. “Not a sound now, if you value your life.”

With the warning he led Martin down the broad, smooth steps. From below came a confused splashing and the booming sound of deep voices. A smoky glare of light was reflected upwards from the tunnel.

Half-way down the Professor drew Martin into a deep niche in the rock wall. There was the snap of a switch, and all of a sudden the whole scene leapt out under the glare of the powerful electrics. At the same moment a shower of arrows came whizzing through the air.

Martin drew a long breath. The Professor had promised that he should see a strange sight, but this—this was beyond anything he could have dreamed of. For there, in the black rock tunnel, just outside the steel bars of the water gate, lay a craft that brought back memory with a flash to the picture-books of his childhood. With its high-beaked prow and raised stern, the shields lining its bulwarks, and the long oars protruding from port-holes in the sides, it was a Norse long-ship, one of those wonderful open craft in which the Vikings crossed the whole width of the stormy Atlantic from Denmark to Greenland and Vineland.

If the craft was wonderful, her crew were more wonderful still. There were about thirty of them. Not one was less than six feet high or forty inches round the chest. Most had skins of a pale golden brown, but two or three were quite fair under their coat of sun tan, and had long, yellow hair. Their splendid appearance was made more splendid by their dress—a sort of close-fitting tunic reaching to the knees, and made of a white fabric blended with gold thread. They wore helmets ornamented with gold, and their shields, too, were studded with great golden bosses.

Sandals were on their feet, bound with leather thongs which criss-crossed their sinewy legs; and for weapons they had not only bows, but short swords and battle-axes, the blades of which were of bronze, heavy and sharp as tempered steel.

“Fine specimens, eh, Martin?” said the Professor in Martin’s ear.

“Splendid,” whispered Martin. “But surely the gate will never hold against them.”

“They know too much to touch it,” answered the Professor dryly. “I shouldn’t like to say how many volts it is charged with.”

“Then what are they doing there at all?” demanded Martin.

“That is what I am here to find out,” replied the Professor. “They know as well as I that the gate forms an impassable barrier.”

There was a pause, but behind a barricade of shields in the bow of the ship something was happening. Martin waited in breathless suspense. All of a sudden two splendid figures, stripped stark naked, dived like otters into the dark water.

“They’re going to dive under the gate,” Martin said in a whisper.

Nearly a minute passed while Martin watched breathlessly the space of water lying between the gate and the wharf where lay the launch. It was clear that the invaders were going down to a great depth so as to avoid the electric barrier.

The dark water broke, and the two heads appeared side by side. The white glare of the electrics showed up every feature plainly; and Martin saw no look of fear in the eyes of either of them. Treading water a minute, they looked all round, then both swam towards the launch and caught hold of the stem.

“They’ll wreck her!” breathed Martin in alarm.

“I don’t think so. Besides—” And Martin saw a smile on the wise old face beside him.

The two giants pulled themselves aboard the launch. They stepped gingerly, glancing around in evident discomfort. A boat with no oars or sails was something they could not comprehend.

The launch rocked a little under the weight of the two Lemurians, who must each have weighed at least fifteen stone, and every ounce of it solid bone and muscle.

Still the Professor did not move. Well hidden in the deep recess, he watched the curious scene beneath.

One of the Lemurians stooped and ventured to lift the hatch over the engine. As he did so, the Professor raised his hand and pulled over a switch. The result was almost as startling to Martin as to the Lemurians. A blast of trumpets sent the echoes crashing up and down the tunnel, and out into the rocky fiord beyond. The sound came from somewhere inside the launch. It

was followed by a voice, a thundering voice which roared out something in a language which Martin could not understand, but which sounded like a very vigorous command.

If Martin did not understand it, the Lemurians did, or, at any rate, they seemed to. They leaped overboard and disappeared into the depths of the channel. A few moments later they bobbed up on the far side of the water-gate, and were hauled aboard the long-ship. The ship instantly cast off. Oars were shoved out, the water boiled under the thrash of the long, heavy blades, and the beautifully designed craft went sweeping away towards the open lake, pursued by demoniacal shouts and trumpet blasts from the empty launch.

It was not until the long-ship was out of sight that Martin at last turned a wondering face to the Professor.

The latter smiled indulgently.

“Quite simple,” he said. “A gramophone with a megaphone attachment. As for the order, those were the only few words of the Lemurian language which we knew. They mean something like ‘Run for your lives.’ I had arranged it so as to be able to switch it on from here, and I may add that if it had not worked, I had a few more surprises up my sleeve.”

Martin burst out laughing.

“Bully!” he exclaimed. “The poor devils! They must have thought that the most awful magic they had ever run across. I’ll bet they’ll never come back.”

“Don’t be too sure about that,” replied the Professor gravely. “Remember, Martin, these men are not savages. They have enormous pluck, and although their superstitious fears have got the better of them for the moment, I will warrant they will try again.”

He stopped short, raising his hand for silence.

“What’s that?” he said sharply.

Before Martin could reply there came a loud and desperate shout from above. “Help, Marse Distin! Help, boss!”

“It’s Scipio,” muttered the Professor, and was off up the great staircase with a speed surprising for a man of his years.

VI. IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY

As Martin raced up the smooth steps he heard a heavy thud and a ringing clatter of metal. He passed the Professor, and ran at full speed between the tall, sculptured columns in the direction of the sound. The Professor having switched on all the electrics, the great hall was as light as day.

“Dis way, Marse Vaile!” came a shout from Scipio; and, as he rounded a great columned pillar, Martin saw in front of him the negro battling desperately with one of the golden giants. Scipio, who was a burly man still in the prime of life, was armed with a tremendous club. That he had used it well was proved by the fact that one of the enemy lay flat upon the rock floor of the hall. The second, however, was pressing him hard, driving at him with his short but deadly-looking sword.

How the Lemurians had got there, or what had happened, there was no time to inquire. All that Martin saw was that Scipio could not last another moment. Swinging his battle ax high in the air, he dashed recklessly into the fray. The great Lemurian, busy with Scipio, did not see the boy coming. When he turned, to see him, it was too late, for Martin had him at his mercy. Yet even in that moment Martin did not forget what the Professor had said about not killing the Lemurians, and it was the blunt back of his ax which smote the tall foeman on the top of his head, and sent him rattling in his armor to the floor.

“Quick, boss!” panted Scipio. “Dere’s more a-coming. See dat hole under de pillar? Dat’s where dey’s coming up. Yo’ help me to shut de door.”

Martin saw in a flash. At the base of the great carven columns gaped a dark opening which had been covered with a slab of stone. This was now leaning against the pillar. Together he and Scipio flung themselves upon the slab. It was desperately heavy, and took all their strength to move it.

Martin had hardly got hold of it before he felt his left leg grasped by a huge hand. He yelled to Scipio, and kicked out desperately. It was useless. He was plucked away as a lion might seize a dog, and the next instant was dragged down into the depths of the pit.

For a moment Martin had a horrible sensation of falling, dropping into unknown depths. Then he was caught—caught as easily as a child might catch a kitten—in a pair of giant arms. He heard a hoarse cry of triumph, and looking up saw, red in the smoky glare of torches, a face more terrible than any he had ever pictured in his wildest dreams.

It was the face of a giant with a nose resembling an eagle's beak, and fierce eyes gleaming like pale steel. The golden heard was turning gray, and the hair was long and gray under the heavy helmet. But it was the mouth that was the worst feature of all. Wide, with thin lips, it showed teeth like those of a wild animal, and by some curious malformation of the upper jaw the eyeteeth on each side projected outside the lower lip, like the tusks of a walrus.

The owner of the face was nearly seven feet high, and had a chest like the gnarled trunk of an old oak.

For a moment he held Martin in both hands, glaring at him with a look of such malice and savagery in those evil gray eyes as made the boy cold to the bone. Then, with a deep laugh, the monster swung him lightly over his shoulder and went striding away down a long, sloping tunnel.

Martin had little time to think. His captor went on at a tremendous pace, and he, hanging like a sack over the giant's shoulders, was bumped and swung till his head swam. A few moments only, and they came out on to a narrow ledge of rock just above the level of the lake.

Lying tied to the ledge was a boat, a sort of shallop, broad and solid, but with low sides. Into this the big man stepped, dumping Martin down in the bottom as unceremoniously as a sack of coals. The next thing that he knew was that the boat was bumping alongside the longship in the open lake.

The tusked giant stooped, grasped him, and, as he swung him up into view of the crew of the longship, the crew burst into a long-drawn shout of "Haro! Haro, Odan!"

Next moment he was pitched into the longship, and found himself lying on the bottom boards between the two benches on which sat the rowers. A fresh roar of triumph from every throat. Then a stern command from Odan, who was evidently the captain of the Lemurians, and the strangely shaped craft sped away towards the mouth of the sea loch.

Left to himself for the moment, Martin tried to pull himself together, and think what was best to be done. For the life of him he could not see any

way out. True, the Lemurians had not tied him, but that did not help. Even if he could seize a chance to spring overboard, they would have him again at once. In any case, the ship was by now a long way from shore, and he had no notion whether he could reach it.

The more he considered matters, the more helpless seemed his position. He knew, of course, that the Professor and Scipio would do all in their power to rescue him, but he could not see how one frail old man and a negro could do very much. They had nothing but the little launch, which would crack like an egg-shell under the driving weight of the Lemurian ship.

Even if Professor Distin were to resort to firearms it would be next to impossible to pick off enough of these many rowers, protected as they were by their thick shields, to cripple the longship.

His heart sank, and with every stroke of the oars he came nearer to despair.

After a while Martin tried cautiously to raise himself so as to see where they were going. His movement was noticed, and a rough hand seized him, shook him, and flung him down again. His blood boiled, but, knowing the utter uselessness of resistance, he lay still.

The sound of the oars changed. The beat was echoed back from cliffs, and Martin knew that the ship must be fast approaching the narrow channel leading to the sea. At the same time he noticed something else. A slight mist was dimming the stars overhead. It thickened so rapidly that even the mast-head of the longship was scarcely visible. He heard an angry growl from Odan, the oar beats slackened, and the longship moved more slowly.

Martin was amazed. Fog on a night like this, and on a warm, almost tropical sea, was a very strange phenomenon. Every moment it grew more dense, and now Martin realized that this was no ordinary mist. It was smoke! He could smell it.

His thoughts flew at once to the volcano. Was this smoke beating down from its lofty crest? or was some fresh eruption beginning? He knew that the great cone was far from extinct; and the Professor had spoken of earthquakes from time to time.

The smoke became so thick that Martin could hardly see a yard before him. It reeked of sulphur. His eyes were streaming, the foul stuff was in his lungs, and he was choking for breath.

Suddenly the gloom was lit by a dull glare of light which seemed to be dead ahead. A moment later came a heavy thudding explosion, the water boiled, and the longship pitched heavily on a series of great, swelling waves. Now Martin was sure that he was right. A volcanic eruption had begun.

Another bump! Then all of a sudden the men around Martin tried to scramble to their feet, and he heard hoarse cries of terror. He himself made an effort to scramble up, and this time no one stopped him. Then, through the reek, appeared a face so hideous that Martin stopped, appalled. With its vast snout, from which hung down a curious tube, it was like nothing human.

It made no sound; but a pair of hands stretched out towards Martin, and, to his utter amazement, they and the arms above them were black!

In a flash he understood. This was Scipio!

He could have shouted with sheer delight, but had no breath. He could only choke. But he knew now, and scrambled up. The hands grasped him firmly, and drew him to his feet.

Half-choked and poisoned as they were, the Lemurians had no intention of parting so easily with their prey. With a hoarse cry of rage the great Odan lunged forward, seized Martin's arm with his monstrous hand, and began to drag him away. Then, from behind Scipio, another hand shot forward. It did not touch Odan, but in an instant he gave a choking bellow of pain and rage, his hold on Martin relaxed, and he staggered back flinging both hands up to his face.

Before he could recover, Scipio had dragged Martin clear, and the two were over the gunwale of the longship and in the launch. Like a flash the light little craft spun round in her own length, and darted away in the opposite direction.

The launch was in the cove harbor and safe inside the water gate before Martin was well enough to speak. Even then the Professor would not let him talk, and Scipio had to help him up the stairs and through the Painted Hall.

Lying in a long chair in the rock-roofed living room, the boy rested and drank a draught which the Professor prepared for him.

"I thought it was the volcano starting up," was the first thing he said.

"I don't wonder," replied the Professor, with his dry little smile. "As a matter of fact, I was taking a leaf out of Admiral Roger Keye's book, and

using a mixture of phosphorus and sulphur which produced a dense artificial fog similar to what the motor launches spread in the attacks on Ostend and Zeebrugge."

"It was jolly smart of you," said Martin heartily.

"It was the only thing to do, Martin. Perhaps, after such a lesson, the Lemurians will leave us alone for a time."

"They'll be fools if they don't," replied Martin, laughing.

Then he started up. "But I say, Professor, what about the prisoners?"

The Professor got up quickly. He looked grave. "Upon my word, Martin, I had completely forgotten them."

"Scipio!" he called.

There was no answer.

"Ah, Scipio has remembered," continued the Professor. "No doubt he has gone to tie them up. Let us go and see."

They hurried into the Painted Hall; but before they had gone many steps, Scipio himself was seen hurrying to meet them.

"What about the prisoners, Scipio?" asked the Professor quickly.

"Dat's jest what I was coming to tell you about, sah. One of dem is dere whar Marse Martin laid him out wid dat battle ax, and I've tied him jest to make sure. But de oder, de one I knocked down, he's done gone. I can't see him nowhar."

The Professor looked at Martin; Martin looked at the Professor. Both faces were grave.

"This is a bad job, sir," said Martin. "Where can he have got to?"

"Dar ain't no doubt about dat, boss. He's gone down dat dar tunnel hole. Me and de Professor, we put de stone back, but he's done lifted it again, for it's a-lying dar on its side."

"Then he has taken to the lake and probably swum after the longship," said the Professor. "But we must make sure. Let us arm ourselves, and take lights, and go down the tunnel."

A few minutes later Martin stood once more in the gloomy tunnel through which he had been carried as prisoner little more than an hour earlier. Scipio was with him; but the Professor had remained behind in the Painted Hall.

The two went quickly out on to the ledge by the water's edge, and Martin looked round in every direction. There was not a sign of any living thing to be seen.

Martin turned to Scipio. “The man can’t have swum very far, Scipio,” he said. “And, personally, I don’t believe he would have been fool enough to try to follow his friends that way. If he did swim out, he has probably landed again in some little cleft near by.”

“I don’t know as he’s been swimming at all, Marse Martin,” responded the negro.

“How do you mean, Scipio?”

“Why, sah, I mean be might hab climbed up dem dar rocks. Yo’ look whar I’m a-pointing.”

Martin looked. Sure enough, there was a sort of cleft—what Alpine climbers call a chimney—up which the Lemurian might very well have forced his way.

“Yes,” said Martin slowly. “It’s quite likely you’re right, Scipio.”

As he spoke he moved forward along a narrow ledge which led to the foot of this curious cleft.

“I wouldn’t go out dar, Marse Martin,” came Scipio’s voice from behind him.

“Why not?” asked Martin, turning.

The movement saved his life, for at that very instant there was a loud rumbling sound overhead, and with a rattle of loose stones an enormous boulder, flung from some unseen height above, came whizzing down. It missed Martin by a mere matter of inches, and plunged into the inlet, flinging up a fountain of foam ten feet into the air.

VII. THE HORROR OF THE HEIGHTS

Never in his life had Martin moved so quickly as in the next few seconds after the fall of the stone. He was back beside Scipio in three jumps, but, quick as he was, a second rock was on its way down before he was actually in safety.

"Dat fellow sure want to kill us mighty bad, Marse Martin," Scipio remarked.

"If you hadn't called to me when you did, he would have killed me, Scipio," replied Martin. "I only just turned in time."

"Well, he didn't git you, sah, and I reckon he won't now," he added quietly. "All de same, it ain't no fun to hab one o' dese here wild men a fossicking round loose all ober dis old island ob ours."

"You're right there, Scipio, it's no fun at all. And it's not going to be fun for any of us until we've got him safely boxed. Strikes me we'd best go back and ask the Professor what we are to do."

The Professor was very much disturbed at the tidings which Martin brought him.

"I don't know what we are to do," he said, shaking his head. "The garden and orchard will be at the Lemurian's mercy. This island is full of hiding-places of which he can take every advantage."

"Don't worry, sir," said Martin. "I'm sure we shall find some way of tackling him. The great thing is to make sure that he can't get in here."

"Quite so. Scipio knows all the entrances. Go round with him and see that all are closed. As for this trap-door in the Painted Hall, we can make it safe by rolling a rock upon it."

"Hadn't we better tie up this other Lemurian before I go?" suggested Martin, anxiously.

The Professor smiled.

"No need for that. The unfortunate man is still insensible. You must have hit him pretty hard, Martin."

"Not too hard, I hope, sir."

“Oh, no! His skull is fairly solid, and he will pull round. But he has concussion, and is not likely to be troublesome for some days to come. Now go and see to the doors.”

Ten minutes later Martin was able to report to the Professor that it was quite impossible for anyone to get in.

“Very good,” said the Professor. “Now you and Scipio can help me to put this man to bed, and after that you had better get some sleep. I foresee a busy day tomorrow.”

The Lemurian was young and not so huge as most of his fellows, yet even so it was as much as the three of them could do to carry him to a room, and put him to bed.

This done, the Professor ordered Martin to bed again, and Martin was not sorry. He was sore all over from the handling he had had that night, and, once he got off to sleep again, never moved until he woke, with the sun blazing through the long window of his room, full in his eyes, and Scipio standing beside him, with a cup of delicious hot chocolate on a tray.

“Bath ready, sah,” announced the good fellow. “Yo come wid me. I show you whar he is.”

The bath was in a rock chamber behind the bedrooms. A stream of water came pouring through the roof into a great rock basin. It was crystal clear and icy cold. Martin fairly revelled in it, and came out with a keen appetite.

“And now, Martin,” said the Professor, when they had finished a hearty breakfast, “the next thing is to devise some plan for capturing our enemy. But how it is to be done I confess I have not the faintest idea. If we start out afoot the chances are we shall find ourselves the hunted instead of the hunters.”

“I should think we should, sir,” Martin answered. “The chap is as strong as all three of us put together. He can move like a cat, jump like a goat, and swim like an otter. Into the bargain, I expect his senses are a lot keener than ours.”

“I agree with every word you say, Martin,” said the Professor. “Yet I do not see any alternative. Do you?”

“Yes,” replied Martin, “I do. I’ve been thinking it over, and it seems to me that our best plan will be to hunt him from the air.”

The other looked up quickly. “Your aeroplane, you mean? I never thought of that. Undoubtedly you are right.”

Martin lost no time in getting aboard his plane.

The great twin engines roared, and the echoes thrown back from the rocky roof were deafening as the graceful machine taxied swiftly down the tunnel, through the fiord, and so into the open lake.

Once outside, Martin opened the throttle to its widest, and, tearing across the smooth surface, pushed over the control, and found himself lifting lightly into the sunny air.

Turning his head he caught a glimpse of the Professor and Scipio just shooting out from the fiord in the launch. In a moment it had dwindled to the size of a toy, and Martin was wheeling upwards in steep circles.

His idea was to cruise about at a moderate height, and endeavor to get sight of the Lemurian.

Very soon he was above the tall cliffs, and sailing over the lower slopes of the great peak in the foot of which were the caves. Above him the snow-clad mountain towered against the blue, like a cone of icing sugar. On the far side of the lake the twin mountain stood up steeper and darker, with its trail of volcanic smoke drifting lazily before the wind.

Martin flew back over the range of caves, and presently caught sight of a long shallow valley down the center of which a stream poured in little waterfalls. The ground on either side was terraced and vividly green.

“Ah, that’s the garden,” he said to himself. “Now, I wonder if the man is there?”

Twice he circled over it, dropping lower. But there was no moving thing, to be seen, and, rising again, he began to search the whole mountain side, quartering to and fro just as a kestrel hawk hunts across a meadow for field-mice or voles.

Half an hour passed, and Martin had seen nothing moving except birds, rock rabbits, and once a great snake trailing its shimmering coils across the rock. He turned north, and began searching that side of the peak.

Here the slope was steeper and wilder. There was little in the way of shrubs, and the only green he saw was strips of grass lining the banks of the many little torrents which came tumbling from the heights.

“Hardly likely that he’s there,” he said to himself; and banking steeply, came round again. As he came round he suddenly caught a glimpse of something moving far up against the steep mountain side. Mere dot as it was he realized that it was something living and something larger than he had yet seen.

Instantly he swung towards it, and his heart gave a great throb.

"It's he," he gasped—"the man himself! But what, in the name of all that's wonderful, is he doing up there?"

It was the Lemurian. Of that there was no doubt whatever. As the plane flashed towards him, Martin could clearly see the sun's rays reflected from the gold on his helmet and corselet, and very soon he saw something else.

Every other moment the reflection from the golden armor was cut off by a great, dark shadow which passed to and fro.

Martin was puzzled.

"Something is attacking him," he said in a low voice. "But what can it be? What creature, except a goat or a mountain sheep, could live on these heights?"

The *Bat* devoured the distance at the rate of a mile and a half a minute, and it was only a matter of seconds before the puzzle was solved. It was no wild beast that was attacking the Lemurian, but a bird; a bird of such monstrous size that it made Martin blink with amazement.

Standing on a ledge, with his back against the sheer rock, the golden giant defended himself bravely with his short sword against the attacks of his enemy. But, big as he was, the bird fairly dwarfed him. Judging roughly, Martin thought that the creature must be at least twelve feet across the wings, and the swift fury of its swoops made him see how fearless and formidable an enemy it was.

Martin wondered what on earth he could do. Naturally, it was impossible to land. It seemed to him that the only thing to do was to fly past as closely as possible, and endeavor to draw off or frighten the huge bird of prey.

He had not much time to consider. Traveling at such speed, he was on the scene of battle in a few seconds. Just as he came swirling up he saw the bird make a fresh dash, and this time its attack appeared to succeed. The Lemurian swayed, staggered, and, falling over sideways, lay motionless on the ledge.

"Poor fellow!" muttered Martin. In spite of the fact that the man had done his best to kill him on the previous evening Martin felt a pang of real sorrow.

Next moment Martin's own hands were full, for the bird, swinging past the fallen man, had sighted the plane, and turned upon it with fury.

“Takes me for another bird,” Martin said aloud. “Well, he’ll learn the difference.” As he spoke he drew his pistol from its holster.

The eagle was coming for him straight as a bullet, and with a speed equal to his own. Martin realized that if the bird got mixed up in the plane, the results might be very serious indeed. Its weight and bulk were so great that it might easily break a blade of one of the tractors, in which case the *Bat* would be helpless as far as flying went.

In order to avoid this danger, he banked sharply and swung out widely from the mountain side. Quick as he was, his enemy was as quick. It struck the right hand upper plane, and Martin saw with dismay that a long strip of the canvas had been torn away.

“The brute!” he cried, and flung the plane into a swift dive.

For the moment he lost sight of the bird, but only for a moment. Then it was at him again. Pulling his control towards him, he shot up again. This brought him abreast of his adversary, and instantly he let fly with his pistol. The shooting seemed to drive the bird frantic with rage, and it came at him like a thunderbolt.

By the smartest possible manouevering he just managed to avoid its onslaught; but the next moment he got a fresh shock, for here was the bird attacking him from the other—that is, the left-hand—side. As he swerved once more to avoid it, he saw, to his horror, that it was not the same bird, but another, even larger than the first.

“A pair of them!” he gasped. “This looks ugly!”

VIII. BATTLE ROYAL

The odds were too great. In a flash Martin saw that his only chance of safety lay in flight. Pushing over the control he let the nose of the *Bat* dip sharply, and, at the same moment opened his throttle to the widest. Instantly he was swooping lakewards at terrific speed.

In an ordinary volplane, or dipping flight, the pilot shuts off his engine completely. Even then the pace is tremendous. Imagine, then, what happens when you are not only dropping, but driving at the same time with the whole of your engine power.

Never since he had first handled a plane had Martin traveled so fast. The air howled past him like a hurricane; beneath, the rugged mountainside shot away like a cinema film. The strain on the *Bat*'s planes was terrific. Martin knew well the heavy risk he was taking, yet, aware of the eagles' powers of flight, he realized that this was his only chance to get away. He ventured to glance back, and there were the two giant birds hurtling in pursuit. But even their marvellous wing power did not equal those of the *Bat*. He was escaping rapidly.

But he was getting dangerously close to the surface of the lake. To hit it at anything like this speed meant certain destruction. He switched off his engine, flattened out, and alighted.

Once more switching on his engine, he started "taxying" across the lake towards the mouth of the Tunnel Cove.

He had had some sort of hope that, once he was on the water, the eagles would leave him. Nothing of the sort. Almost before he had started they came swooping down at him.

But now Martin was in a better position to deal with them. For the moment he could leave the plane to take care of itself. Snatching up his automatic, he opened fire upon the first of the great birds of prey, which was close upon him. One of the bullets struck it full in the breast, and down it came upon the water, thrashing the calm surface into foam with its wings.

An automatic is like a machine gun. It goes on firing as long as the finger is pressed on the trigger. As Martin swung round to fire at his second

assailant the rapid explosions ceased, and he realized with a thrill of horror that the magazine was exhausted.

The second eagle—the female, and the larger of the two—seemed roused to fresh fury by the downfall of her mate, and came at Martin like a bolt shot from a catapult. He did the only thing possible—flung himself down at the bottom of the "nacelle," or hull, of the flying boat, and lay flat, while he feverishly strove to thrust fresh cartridges into his pistol.

He felt the wind of the vast pinions as the bird swung just above him, heard a rending tear as her hooked talons ripped the canvas of the plane just overhead, and knew that her first swoop had missed.

Then came a fresh misfortune. In his hurry he jammed the pistol. A cartridge stuck half in and half out. The weapon was useless. It was hardly likely that the eagle would fail a second time.

Nothing happened, however—at least, nothing happened to Martin, yet he could still hear the beating of the great bird's wings. He could also hear a splashing sound, and at the same time was conscious of a curious harsh, musky odor.

After a moment or two curiosity got the better of fright, and he ventured to raise his head and look round. The sight that met his eyes nearly paralyzed him.

Out of the deep water of the lake had risen something that looked like the head and neck of a great snake, and between this new horror and the eagle a battle royal was raging.

Petrified with amazement, Martin stared at this marvelous combat. The engine had stopped, the tractors had ceased to revolve, but Martin never thought of pressing the electric starter again. He utterly forgot his own danger in watching such a sight as perhaps no human being had seen since the dawn of man's history.

The first thing he realized was that the water beast was not a snake. The head and neck were more like those of one of the snapping turtles which are common in all tropical waters. The neck looked as if cased in loose leather, while the head was purely a turtle's with a wide mouth armed with jaws of solid bone. Then he saw, beneath the surface, the body of the monster shaped like a monstrous dish-cover and plated with a greenish shell.

The creature's head flashed this way and that in movements so quick that he could hardly follow them, while its beak-like jaws kept snapping

together with a harsh clipping sound. Its eyes, with raised horny lids like those of an alligator, had an indescribably vicious gleam.

Quick as it was, the eagle was quicker. Martin could not help admiring the dauntless pluck with which she hurled herself against this fearful enemy, buffeting the monster with her powerful wings and slashing it with her great curved beak. Good blows, too, for dark red blood was already dripping from the head of the huge fish-lizard.

The lizard rose higher in the water, so that its vast domed shell came above the surface. Waves washed against the hull of the *Bat*, the reddened foam splashing right over the coaming. Its thick tail rose, lashing the surface of the lake; and Martin felt that a single stroke would be enough to smash his frail craft and sink it.

Then what chance would he stand, swimming for his life in water haunted by such terrors?

Martin jumped up and pressed the electric starter. There was a splitting sound, but nothing happened. For some reason unknown, the engine refused to fire.

He set to work with desperate energy to find out what was wrong, while the *Bat* heaved and swung upon the swells flung up by the titanic struggles of the water monster. At any moment the fight might swing down upon him. Or if either of the fighters won, the survivor would, he felt, be certain to turn upon him.

Feathers drifted in a shower all over him. The lizard had got a blow home. But the eagle was not badly damaged, for she fought more furiously than ever. The reek of musk from the water-beast nearly made him sick. The creature whirled again, and its thick, stumpy tail actually struck the hull of the *Bat*. He saw it half turn, caught the gleam of its wicked eyes, and gave himself up for lost.

Next moment the roar of a heavy explosion sent echoes clattering along the cliffs; Martin heard the unmistakable hiss of a charge of heavy shot passing close to his head, and at the same instant the water-beast went over sideways, floundering hideously in the blood-stained waves.

The eagle, startled by the crash, rose a little, only to swoop down again at once, striking at her adversary with the same fury as ever.

But the beast was not dead, and next instant up it reared again. Out shot its long, scaly neck, and struck like a serpent at the eagle. This time the

horned jaws caught her fairly by the wing. A moment later, she, the fish-lizard and all, had vanished into the fathomless depths of the tarn.

Still breathless with his ordeal, Martin rose to his feet.

"Thanks be to gracious, you's safe, boss," came Scipio's familiar voice; and there was the launch right alongside, the Professor at the tiller, Scipio, armed with a heavy ten-bore duck-gun, standing in the bows.

"Thanks to you, Scipio," answered Martin. "But it was touch and go. What was that awful creature, Professor?"

"A plesiosaurus, I believe, Martin," replied the old gentleman gravely. "A reptile belonging to the world's earliest days, and long supposed to be extinct, but in some way preserved in this strange corner of the earth. It was a narrow escape indeed, lad. Now, tell me, did you find the Lemurian?"

"I found him," Martin answered gravely. "He is far up the mountain-side. The eagles were attacking him. Then they went for me; and I had to clear as quickly as ever I could."

"Is the man hurt?"

"Badly, I'm afraid."

The Professor looked grave.

"We must go to his help," he said. "Scipio, throw Mr. Vaile the rope. We will tow the *Bat* in, then start at once up the mountain."

When Martin got back into the cave he was amazed to find that it was not yet eleven. It seemed hours since he had left the cave, yet was actually no more than fifty minutes. The Professor insisted on his drinking a cup of coffee. Then the three took food, a rope, their guns, and a first-aid outfit, and started at once up the steep, rocky side of the mountain.

Pretty soon Martin saw that the Professor was breathing hard. He stopped.

"It's too much for you, sir," he said. "You wait, and Scipio and I will go on."

Alone, Scipio and Martin made much quicker time; and in about an hour Martin stopped and pointed to a ledge overhead.

"That's where I left him," he said in a low voice to the negro.

Scipio pulled up.

It was a stiff scramble up to the ledge, and the last part of the way they had to drag themselves up by their hands.

Martin was the first to get his head above the rim of the rugged platform of rock. Scipio, close behind, heard him gasp.

"What's de matter, boss?"

"He's gone!" answered Martin sharply. "There isn't a sign of him."

"Yo' suah dis de right place, Marse Martin?"

"Dead certain," replied Martin.

"And de feller was lyin' heah dead when yo' flew away?"

"He was lying wounded and insensible. Why, there's a patch of blood. See?" Scipio looked. Sure enough, there was an ugly red stain on the dark stone. He grunted uncomfortably.

"Dey do say dese heah island folk am magic men, sah."

"Bosh!" retorted Martin impatiently. "The man must be quite close. He couldn't have gone far."

A small stone rattling down from above made both look up sharply. Martin drew a quick breath. Well he might, for there, on another ledge, ten or twelve feet higher up, was the Lemurian himself, looking down upon them.

He was a magnificent yet terrible figure. Fully six feet six inches in height, and splendidly proportioned, he stood leaning on his sword. His helmet gleamed golden in the vertical rays of the blazing sun, but the rest of his dress and armor were dull and dabbled with blood. His eyes, blue as the sky above, were fixed upon the intruders.

For a moment there was complete silence. Scipio was the first to speak.

"Oh, golly, boss!" he gasped. "Yo' didn't know what yo' was talking about. Dat man ain't dead at all!"

IX. BREAD AND SALT

Martin paid no attention to Scipio. He stood as still as the great Lemurian himself, gazing fixedly up at him.

Then as he stared he noticed that the Lemurian's blue eyes were glazed, and realized that the man was sorely hurt, and that it was only by sheer will-power that he kept his feet at all. Suddenly he felt desperately sorry for his splendid opponent.

"You poor chap!" he said pitifully; and stepped quietly forward.

The Lemurian, of course, could not understand the words that Martin said, but quite clearly he did understand the tone in which they were spoken. He made no effort to raise his sword, but stood quite still. Then just as Martin reached him, his giant strength went out of him, he slipped down quietly, and collapsed in a heap on the rock.

Martin dropped on his knee beside him, and lifted his head.

Scipio came up slowly.

"Yo' be careful, Marse Martin. For all yo' know, dat fellow is playing 'possum."

"Nonsense! He's half dead. Look at the way he's been mauled. Why, he's lost a quart of blood."

With Scipio's help he managed to drag him out of the fierce sun-blaze to the shadow of a deep rock shelf, and set about bandaging the wounds.

There were two ugly gashes in the left arm and shoulder, and another in the man's side. Their depth showed the knife-like power of the great cliff-eagle's beak. In themselves, however, the wounds were not dangerous —the real danger lay in the loss of blood.

Martin finished his bandaging.

"How in the world shall we ever get him down the mountain?" he asked in dismay as he stood up and looked at the massive length of limb of his patient.

"I reckon we'll hab to leab him hyah, boss. It's one suah t'ing dis nigger can't carry dat man."

Before Martin could answer the giant opened his eyes, and, to Martin's amazement, sat up.

"Steady on!" said Martin quickly. "You must keep still."

The giant smiled as if he understood, and the smile took all the grimness out of his face and made him look quite human. He said some words, and stretched out his great hand.

Martin saw that he wanted something, but was not quite sure what. The big man pointed to his mouth, then Martin understood.

"Water—that's what he's after. Where's the bottle, Scipio?"

Scipio, who was getting over his nervousness, produced the bottle, and the Lemurian drank deeply.

Martin next opened a parcel of bread and meat. At the same time he took out a small packet of salt, and offered this to his prisoner. The Lemurian hesitated, and looked very hard at Martin. Then, seemingly satisfied, he took a pinch of salt, sprinkled it on a piece of the bread, and began to eat. Martin drew a long breath of relief. He knew how much bread and salt meant to the ancient Norsemen. Now he was sure that he, the Professor, and Scipio had nothing more to fear from this man. Whatever happened he was their friend.

The Lemurian ate like a starved man. With every mouthful his strength came back, and when he had finished he looked another man.

Even so, Martin hardly supposed he would he able to stand, let alone walk. But he rose easily to his feet and pointed downwards, evidently asking whether it was not time to start back.

"Dat fellow's a libbing wonder, Marse Martin," observed Scipio. "Yo' couldn't kill him wid an ax."

"Don't try, Scipio," said Martin dryly; and led the way downhill.

A little later he brought him safely into the cave. The moment they stepped into the Painted Hall the giant pulled up short and looked around him. His expression changed, and suddenly he dropped on his knees and lowered his head, raising his hands with a strange gesture.

"I thought so." It was Professor Distin's voice. "This is their holy place. Martin, I congratulate you on taming the giant. Was he any trouble?"

"None. He took bread and salt."

"Excellent. It was clever of you to remember that. Then he will be our friend, and I must say"—the Professor's voice was suddenly grave—"I am glad of it."

“Why do you say that?” asked Martin quickly. “Were you afraid of him?”

“There is something of which I am very much more afraid,” answered the Professor. “I will explain at some other time. Now we must get our patient to bed.”

The morning sun, pouring through the tall windows of the great cliff room, shone brightly on the snowy cloth of the breakfast-table, and on the piles of richly colored fruit which were always a part of every meal. Martin and the Professor had just taken their seats, and Scipio had brought in the coffee and the usual dish of deliciously grilled fish.

“How is he, Professor?” asked Martin.

“Doing very well indeed. He has little fever, and his wounds are healing fast. The man has the health of a savage together with the build and will-power of the Norsemen who were his ancestors.”

“I wish we knew something about him,” said Martin.

“I know quite a good deal already,” replied the Professor, with a smile. “I have found out his name, which is Akon. And as he is clearly a pure-blooded Norseman, I am practically certain that he is the son of a chief. And I know how old he is. He told me on his fingers. He is twenty-four.”

“Pure Norse, is he?” exclaimed Martin. “I say, Professor, I wonder if he knows the Norwegian language?”

“Impossible!” he answered. “Modern Norse is quite different from the language of the days when his forefathers landed on Lemuria.”

“But wait a minute! Surely I have read somewhere that they still talk the old language up in Iceland. Yes, and that even the children understand the ancient sagas, or Songs of the Vikings.”

The Professor’s face lighted up.

“Upon my word, I believe you are right,” he said. “And, as it happens, I have a copy of the sagas here. They belonged to poor Krieger. I shall try the experiment immediately after breakfast.”

The meal finished, he bustled off to where Akon was lying in bed, and it was nearly an hour before he came back.

“You were right, Martin!” he burst out. “He does understand. Of course, he cannot read; and as for me, I know very little of the language. But you should have seen his face light up when I read to him! He took it all in. We shall be all right now,” he went on. “Within a very short time we

shall be able to understand one another; and I shall learn more about this extraordinary island."

He was tremendously pleased and happy about it all; but Martin still had in his mind the memory of the old gentleman's grave face the previous afternoon, when he had spoken of some mysterious danger which seemed to threaten them.

"How about the other man?" he asked.

"His name is Thur," the Professor told him. "I got that out of Akon. Thur has got his senses back, but he is not fit to move. I think we can safely leave him and Akon in Scipio's care while I show you our dynamos."

"I'm awfully keen to see them," declared Martin, as he followed the Professor out of the room.

The latter led the way down a passage cut, like the rest of the cave dwelling, in the living rock, and lit, like the rest, by electricity. As they came near a door he heard the deep, low roar of falling water.

The Professor opened the door, and the roar became deafening. He touched a switch, and a great glow of white light shone upon a solid column of shining black water which came plunging down through the roof, driving the turbine which was set in the opening beneath, then disappearing through an opening in the floor.

"All the power we want," shouted the Professor in Martin's ear. "And the beauty of it is that we found the fall just as it is now after we came here."

"Then all that power has been wasting for hundreds of years," said Martin.

"Thousands perhaps," replied the Professor. "Though, mind you, I believe the ancient folk who cut this cave and the flume through which the water comes must have done so with a purpose. They may have used it for a mill, or for all we know they understood electricity as well as we do."

"And here the water will go on running for thousands of years more," said Martin.

"I am not so sure about that," began the Professor, then stopped short. For as he spoke the solid rock beneath their feet seemed to heave and sway, and down below was a rumbling deep and hoarse, like the passing of hundreds of heavily loaded wagons.

Martin clutched at the cold, wet wall of the cave for support.

"What is it?" he gasped.

“An earthquake,” answered the Professor, who was also clinging to the wall.

Again the whole cave swayed dizzily. The motion was like that of a slow swell, the floor rising and falling beneath their feet. Martin felt sick and dizzy.

It passed, and the growling rumble died in the distance.

Dead silence followed.

“Look!” muttered Martin—“look! The stream has stopped!”

It had. Just as if a tap had been turned off, the waterfall had vanished.

“The bank has fallen in above,” said the Professor. “We must see to it at once, or we shall be left in darkness. Martin,” he added, “that was a bad shock.”

“Do you have them often?” asked Martin.

“Pretty frequently, but as a rule only slight tremors. Of late they have been getting worse. That, Martin, is part of the danger of which I spoke to you.”

He paused, and his face was very grave.

“That decides me,” he continued. “As soon as possible I will take you across the lake. Then you can judge for yourself the peril that confronts us. Now we must go and find where the stream is dammed.”

Outside was Scipio, looking badly scared.

“My golly, boss, dat was the worse one yet! I reckoned de roof was a-coming down on our heads.”

“Any damage done?” asked the Professor.

Scipio shook his woolly head.

“Broke a whole heap of crockery, sah. And dere ain’t no shops heah whar we kin buy cups and saucers.”

“I dare say we shall have enough to last us,” said the Professor, with a smile. “The worst of it is that it has cut off our water, Scipio. You had better get some dynamite and go up with Mr. Vaile and see to it.”

Martin and Scipio found that the block was caused by a great boulder which had rolled into the bed of the brook. But before they reached it, the water had risen above it, and was pouring over. So, as there was no need to do anything, they came straight back.

“Yes; the water began to flow again almost as soon as you had started,” said the Professor. “Very well, Martin, I will keep my promise, and as soon as we have had some luncheon, we will take the launch and cross

the lake. I think I shall be able to show you something that you will never forget till your dying day.”

X. THE LAKE OF FIRE

Professor Distin was silent as the launch went rushing across the lake. As for Martin, he, too, sat without speaking, watching the long trail of white foam which spread away across the dark blue water of the deep tarn.

The launch slid in under the shadow of the tall cliffs opposite. It was getting well on in the afternoon, and the sun was low. Martin looked up at the towering walls of rock and at the great peak above. He noticed the thin cloud of smoke which rose from the flank of the volcano, and began to feel curious as to the object of their trip and the nature of the Professor's warning.

But the Professor said nothing. He sat very still, steering the launch straight in towards the foot of the tall precipice that bounded the lake.

Just as it seemed as though they were going to run hard against the cliff, Martin saw an opening, and presently they were in a deep narrow fiord similar to those which Martin had already seen on the other side of the lake. This one, however, was longer and deeper than any which Martin had seen, and its sides were so lofty that the cliffs seemed almost to meet overhead. They cut off the light, so that the calm water at the bottom looked like dark-green glass. There was no sign of life in the gloomy place.

The Professor kept straight up the center of the fiord. It curved to the right, and as the launch rounded the bend Martin became aware that there was a beach in front, and, beyond it, a long rough slope running steeply upwards.

The Professor stopped the motor. The launch, glided gently up to the beach and grounded quietly on soft, dark-looking shingle.

"We get out here," said the Professor.

Martin followed him up the slope. It was rough walking, and at every step their feet sank ankle deep into soft, dark, powdery shale.

"Looks like ash," said Martin under his breath.

"It is ash," answered the Professor in an equally low voice.

Every now and then he was forced to stop and take breath. At last they left the ash slope and got on to a narrow ledge-like path running along

the face of the cliff which rose to the right.

And now Martin became aware of a curious slow sound. It was like the bubbling of a giant kettle. Every now and then there was a sharp snap almost like the bursting of a bicycle tire.

The Professor stopped and took something out of his pocket which he unfolded and handed to Martin. It was a kind of mask.

"Put it on," said the Professor. "If the draught draws down the cleft the fumes are sometimes very bad."

He showed Martin how to tie it on, then donned one himself. It gave him the oddest appearance, but, all the same, Martin did not feel like laughing. The Professor's looks and tone made him feel sure that this business was something really serious.

The ledge, if narrow, was better than the ash slope. They got on more quickly. But as they moved forward the bubbling sound grew louder and whiffs of sulphurous gas met them. In spite of the mask they caught Martin's throat and nostrils and made him choke.

In half an hour they had climbed several hundred feet above the water-level. The cleft was still as narrow as ever and its coal-black walls still towered high overhead. As Martin looked up it struck him that it had not been long made. The rocks were very little worn by weather, and there was not a blade of grass or any green thing to be seen.

Meantime the bubbling grew louder and louder, and presently Martin saw that they were getting to the end of the gorge, which seemed to break off abruptly. The Professor turned and signed to Martin to go quietly. Then he himself went cautiously forward.

Presently he stopped, and beckoned Martin to come up. Martin did so, and a moment later found himself standing on the very rim of an immense bowl of rock and looking down into a sea of fire.

Although the sounds he had heard had prepared him for something of the sort, the grandeur and horror of the sight left him speechless. All he could do was to stand on that tremendous verge and stare down dumbly into the awful cauldron that yawned beneath.

The crater was about a third of a mile across, the sides were of dark volcanic rock broken by great spurs, and at the bottom, some three or four hundred feet beneath the rim rock, there heaved and bubbled a lake of lava. In the center, where the molten stuff bubbled up, the glow was so intense it hurt the eyes to look at it. Nearer the edges the stuff was cherry red. But

none of the surface was at rest, even for a moment. All of it boiled and seethed like a cauldron hung over a hot fire. Every moment great bubbles rose, swelling six or eight feet high and perhaps twenty across. These, as they burst and fell, produced the popping noises which he had heard.

The whole surface smoked constantly, but the fierce heat rising from the molten mass carried up the smoke with it, so that the surface of the burning lake was very little hidden by the vapors of its burning. The spot they stood upon was at the bottom of a gap in the crater rim. Everywhere else the black cliffs towered up two or three thousand feet.

The sight was a terrible one, yet so fascinating that Martin could not take his eyes off it. He was roused at last by the Professor's voice, and saw that he had drawn back a little and removed his mask.

"What do you think of it, Martin?"

"It's the most wonderful sight I ever saw," declared Martin.

"Yes, but does nothing else occur to you?"

Martin looked around, and stared up at the huge walls of the crater.

"Yes," he said. "I had no idea that a crater could be so deep."

The Professor nodded.

"Ah," he said, "that is what I meant. If you will look again you will realize that the surface of the lava is very little above that of the lake outside. Now do you realize the danger?"

Martin drew a long breath. In a moment the real extent of the peril flashed across him.

"Krakatoa," he breathed.

"Exactly. I see you understand. That tremendous explosion, the greatest ever known in the history of volcanic eruptions, was caused by the sea bursting in upon a vast mass of molten lava. The result was that thousands of tons of water were instantly turned to steam. Two-thirds of an island nearly as large as this were blown into the air, three hundred villages were destroyed, the wave thrown up washed all round the world, and the sound of the explosion was heard three thousand miles away. As for the dust, it hung in the upper atmosphere for three years."

"And you think that may happen here?" gasped Martin.

"It will happen sooner or later," replied the Professor, with deadly certainty. "This rift has been formed within the last century, and even within my recollection is deeper and wider than it used to be. The increasing

severity of the earthquakes proves that the subterranean disturbances are increasing."

Martin whistled softly.

"Then we are living on a boiler with the safety valve screwed down. Strikes me that we had best quit as soon as possible," he said.

"Yes," said the Professor. "I am afraid that is the case." He paused, and shook his head.

"Martin, I am fond of this place. I had hoped to end my days here. But I have come to think that, old as I am, the catastrophe may occur before I am due to go out of this life. Yet I am most anxious to solve the problem of Lemuria and of its people. And if it be possible, I would wish to visit the other island before I return to the world of men."

"I'll take you there, sir," declared Martin stoutly. "Just wait until we've made Akon understand what we are after. Then I'll take him over in the *Bat* and come back for you. With Akon to help us, it will all be plain sailing."

"Indeed, I hope it may be," said the Professor earnestly. "And now, Martin, if you have seen enough, let us get back. These vapors and the heat try my old throat and lungs sorely."

Next day Martin was up early and at work repairing the *Bat*, the planes of which had been badly ripped by the talons of the cliff eagles. The Professor meanwhile was with Akon, reading to him the Icelandic sagas, and doing his best to master the language himself.

The days went by quickly. When Martin had finished the repairs of the *Bat*, he busied himself in the garden, and in the evenings he worked at the Norse language. Akon, now quite himself again, was free to go where he liked; and it amused Martin to show him the turbines, the electric light, and other scientific apparatus.

The *Bat* was Akon's principal source of wonder. He would go and stand by it and stare at it for minutes at a time, but never offer to touch it. The launch itself puzzled him a good deal, but he was able to understand that the screw drove it, though how the screw was made to work by the oil engine was a mystery to him.

Thur, the other Lemurian, was still unable to do much. He was a silent person, rather stupid, and evidently stood in awe of Akon.

One evening, when Martin came in, he found the Professor waiting for him.

“Martin,” said the old gentleman quickly, “I was right. Akon is the son of the King of Lemuria. He made me understand that today. What is more, he says that his people will certainly come after him. I gather that they have a considerable fleet of long-ships, and will probably come in force.”

“They’ve been long enough about it,” replied Martin.

“That to me makes matters look the worse,” declared the Professor. “It means that they are making great preparations. And if a large force were to invade us I do not see what we could do. I do not like the prospect at all.”

Martin considered a moment.

“Tell you what, Professor,” he said. “I’ll go and see. Tomorrow I will take the *Bat* and fly to Lemuria, and bring back word of what is happening.”

The Professor nodded.

“Very well, my lad. But come back as quickly as you can.”

The *Bat* was in first-rate order, and when, true to his promise, Martin started out soon after daylight next morning, he found her great twin engines working to perfection. He taxied out to the middle of the lake, then rose and, circling upwards until he got his height, headed due west for the mysterious island.

It was another wonderful day, so calm that the smoke from the volcano rose straight into the azure sky, spreading out into a kind of parasol at an enormous height. Beneath, the ocean lay like silk. There was very little weed in the waters which separated Lost Island from Lemuria, but out on the rim of the horizon the brown stuff lay in long dark ribs across the peaceful blue.

Very swiftly Lemuria leaped into view. It was, Martin saw, a larger but less mountainous land than Lost Island. But before he was near enough to examine any details a number of dark spots stretched in a long line across the sea caught his attention. From his dizzy height they looked no larger than water-beetles, but it did not need a second glance to tell him what they were.

The Lemurian fleet had already put to sea. Before night the long-ships would be upon Lost Island.

XI. AKON’S DECISION

Five—ten—fifteen—there were no fewer than eighteen of the long-ships in the Lemurian fleet, and since each carried sixty to eighty men, here was a most formidable force.

The enemy must be stopped—stopped at any cost, and as far as Martin could see there was only one way to do it. Round he swung, banking steeply, and went tearing back towards Lost Island.

Less than half an hour after starting, the *Bat* dropped again toward the sea lake, and lit smoothly on its mirror-like surface.

The launch was alongside almost as soon as it had alighted, and Professor Distin was anxiously asking what had brought him back so quickly.

As Martin explained a look of dismay crossed the Professor’s face.

“Eighteen ships!” he repeated. “But, Martin, this is an army. What are we to do?”

“There is only one thing to do,” Martin answered firmly. “Akon must come back with me, meet his people, and tell them exactly how things stand. They will listen to him.”

Akon was in the launch with the Professor. The fair-haired giant was listening eagerly, but, of course, without understanding what was said. Yet it was plain from his face that he realized something to be seriously wrong.

The Professor rapidly explained the situation; and Martin, watching, saw a curious expression cross the big man’s face, but he listened without speaking until the Professor had finished, then answered in a few blunt words.

The Professor gave a sigh of relief.

“He will go with you, Martin,” he said. “But he is not quite happy. There is something he does not like about the business, but what he does not say.”

“He’s too modest,” Martin answered with a laugh. “Come, Akon.”

Akon rose and stepped cautiously into the hull of the *Bat*. His lips were set very tight, and there was a curious glint in his pale-blue eyes.

Akon had always a sort of superstitious dread of the flying boat, and this was the first time he had ever been aboard her.

But the fine old Viking strain in him forbade him to show the slightest sign of fear, and he took his seat as calmly as if he had been flying all his life.

"Good luck to you both!" cried the Professor, then his voice was drowned in the roar of the twin engines as Martin switched on, and, gliding swiftly across the water, rose for the second time.

For the moment he was too busy with the controls to look back, but when he had got his height and was able to turn, Akon was sitting like a chunk of marble and with just about as much expression on his big, handsome face.

"Cheer up," cried Martin, speaking in Norse, of which he had now learnt nearly as much as the Professor himself. "We are quite safe. There are the ships."

Akon did not answer. The fierce rush through the air seemed to have taken his breath. But he saw the ships and his eyes brightened.

To Martin it seemed that the fleet had hardly moved since he had first sighted it. As a matter of fact, it was coming up steadily before a light westerly breeze. But as Martin stooped towards it he noticed that the smoke from the volcano, which twenty minutes earlier had been rising straight into the sky, was now trailing out in a sou-westerly direction. The upper current of air had changed right round; and short as had been his stay on Lost Island, Martin had a pretty good idea what that meant.

But there was no time to say anything now. Every instant the long-ships grew nearer, and in a few moments the *Bat* was above them.

Looking down, Martin thought they looked exactly like those water beetles that go paddling around on a pond. Their long oars sprawled out on either side like the legs of those insects. The Lemurians saw him, too, for many stopped rowing, and the fleet fell out of line and became confused.

Martin cut out his engines and began to glide downwards.

"Akon," he said, "when we get down, you talk."

Akon nodded grimly. The *Bat* planed steeply, and within a few seconds swept over the masthead of the leading ship, and came to rest sweetly as a dropping gull on the silken swells, close to the long, low hull of the Lemurian flag-ship.

With one accord, every man in the long-ship stopped rowing, and from behind the golden shields that lined the bulwarks scores of heads rose and stared in silent, breathless amazement at the graceful fabric which had descended upon them out of the blue.

Akon rose to his full height. His great voice thundered out!

He was not speaking Norse now. This was the true Lemurian language. But if Martin could not understand the words, there could be no doubt what Akon was saying. He was taunting his people for cowards for bringing hundreds of men against three, and ordering them to return. Next he pointed with his right hand to his own side, then to Martin, and Martin grew red as he guessed that Akon was telling them of his rescue from the eagles.

He stopped and the next moment a figure rose on the foredeck of the long-ship—a man as tall as Akon himself and even broader. In a flash Martin recognized the fierce face, steely eyes, and tusklike teeth of Odan, the great savage who had captured him in the first invasion.

Odan was furiously angry as he addressed Akon. When he stopped, Akon stooped and spoke briefly to Martin.

“He says you are a wizard, and that I am a friend of wizards,” he explained. “But wait. I am their prince—son of their king. They shall obey me, not Odan.”

He lifted his voice again, and it rang out clear and strong, reaching every one of the hundreds in the fleet. When Akon paused, a hoarse roar of cheering broke out. Martin glowed. He felt that Akon had won the day.

But Odan was not done yet. Up he sprang again, and began to urge something fiercely on his hearers.

“He says that you have prevented them from using the holy place,” explained Akon briefly; “that you must leave the island. But wait! I will return to Lemuria and explain all to my father, the king.”

He paused a moment.

“Will you take me there?” he asked suddenly.

Martin did not hesitate a moment.

“I will,” he answered.

As the *Bat* rose swiftly from the sea Martin, glancing downwards, saw hundreds of faces raised towards her, hundreds of pairs of eyes watching the great flying machine with awe which was almost terror.

But discipline was strong. Next moment the oars lashed the water. Each ship turned and made back towards Lemuria.

Martin heaved a sigh of relief. Then, turning, he glanced back. It was as he had expected. Up in the north-east the blue sky was smudged with purple-black cloud—a cloud that grew fast and was edged with a rim of snow-white vapor rolling over and over like foam at the edge of a stormy sea.

He pointed it out to Akon.

"Bad for your ships," he said; and Akon nodded gravely.

Martin opened his throttle wide and sent the *Bat* skirling through the air. Within ten minutes the Lemurian fleet had dwindled to dots in the distance, while Lemuria's sandy beaches stretched wide across the western sea. Martin tingled with excitement. In a few moments he would set foot in the land of mystery.

"Where can we come down?" he asked of his companion.

Akon pointed, and Martin saw blue water lying inland. It was a harbor connected by a long inlet with the sea.

The sun still shone brilliantly, though in the east the great cloud was blotting out the blue. Martin grew anxious. At all costs he must get the *Bat* under cover of some sort before the storm broke.

A few moments later and they were over the land.

He cut out, and came sweeping soundlessly downwards towards the lake. Now he could see that there was a town alongside the harbor. The houses were the strangest he had ever dreamed of. They were one-storied buildings with great domed roofs, and built of enormous stones. On a hill in the center rose one building much higher than the rest, the roof of which shone with a dazzling yellow splendor. Martin's eyes widened as he saw it was covered all over with gold.

There was little time to look about. The *Bat* took the water close to a solid-looking stone quay that fronted the harbor.

Martin turned to Akon.

"Storm coming," he said. "Where can we put her?"

Akon pointed to a building facing the harbor. Martin taxied across towards it, and found it to be a large boathouse. A great barge, gorgeously painted and gilded, lay there, blocking the way; but Akon, stepping out of the *Bat*'s hull on to the barge's stern, pushed her to one side, leaving just room for the flying boat.

Martin tied the *Bat* up firmly. He was only too grateful to have her under cover. Then Akon beckoned, and Martin followed up a flight of broad stone steps on to the quay.

Not a soul was in sight. Everyone had bolted into their houses. The broad quay lay silent and deserted in the glaring sunlight. But though the sun still blazed down, the velvet pall was rising steadily in the east, and the sultry air tingled with the threat of the coming storm.

Akon led the way towards the tall building, which stood by itself on rising ground. He walked with long strides, and held his head proudly. Martin, staring about him, saw that the houses were built of a curious dark-red stone, and that the door-posts, each made of one huge slab, were carved with figures reminding him of the Egyptian room in the British Museum. All these buildings seemed to be of immense age. Indeed, they were so massive and solid that nothing short of an earthquake could have destroyed them.

The strangest thing about the place was the silence. There must have been scores of people within earshot, yet not a face showed from a doorway or window; there was no sound or sign of life.

"What's up?" asked Martin; but Akon walked straight on, straight up a broad flight of shallow steps leading to the gold-roofed temple. Huge statues with the bodies of men and heads of beasts lined the steps. They seemed to glare sternly at Martin. The steps led right up to the face of the monstrous building which towered above them; and as they climbed Martin saw, to his astonishment, that there was no door. Sheer blank wall faced them inhospitably.

Martin's heart began to beat uncomfortably. There was something uncanny about the whole place.

Akon, however, strode on undismayed, and, reaching the wide landing at the top, stamped twice with his heavy foot, then stood silent.

Martin stood close behind him, wondering what was going to happen. He had not long to wait. A dark slit appeared in the wall; two vast slabs slid silently back, and in the opening appeared as strange a figure as mortal eyes had ever rested upon.

XII. THE PRIEST'S PLAN

The man who stood in the opening was not more than five feet six in height, but looked even less, owing to his enormous breadth. His chest and shoulders were those of a giant.

Of his face Martin could see nothing, for it was covered with a thin golden mask from which stood out all around curved rays of beaten gold. He was dressed in a sleeved robe of silken fabric of gorgeous purple. On the breast was embroidered a great golden sun, while sleeves and skirt were ornamented with patterns made of some yellow shining stone cut in thin disks. Martin knew at once that this was a priest of the sun.

Through holes in the mask a pair of keen blue eyes regarded Akon and Martin.

For a moment there was dead silence. Then, with a quickness startling in so massive a figure, the priest turned and beckoned them to follow. They stepped into a lofty passage floored and walled with massive slabs of smooth, reddish stone; and the moment they were inside their host pulled over a lever and the huge leaves of the stone door closed like the jaws of a trap.

The door had hardly shut before the priest had caught Akon by both hands, crying out a greeting in a voice that rumbled like thunder down the vaulted passage.

Akon returned the greeting most heartily, then, stretching out his great arm, drew Martin forward, and speaking in Norse, introduced him.

"He is my friend, Hymer," he said. "He has saved my life. Harm must not come to him."

Hymer, the priest, took Martin's hand.

"Your friends, Prince Akon, are mine," he said, and he, too, spoke in Norse, and spoke so clearly that Martin had no difficulty in understanding him. "But come into my room," he said. "I have much to tell you."

Opening a door he led them into a large room with painted walls. There was a rich carpet on the floor; but the only furniture was a low, round

table and a number of large cushions scattered about. The place was lighted from above by a sort of skylight glazed with sheets of talc.

The first thing the priest did was to take off his golden mask and fling it aside.

"Bah!" he said impatiently. "I am sick of this mummery." Then he dropped on a cushion and signed to the others to be seated.

"Now, Prince," he said, "tell your story, for time presses, and there is much to do."

Akon plunged at once into his story, and Hymer listened with keen interest. Martin, looking at him, saw that he was, like Akon, a Norseman. He appeared to be about sixty, but was still immensely fit and strong; also, he seemed to be miles ahead in brain power of any of the rest of the Lemurians. For one thing, he was not in the least surprised to hear of the flying machine or the "boat that goes without oars or sail," as Akon described the launch.

When Akon had finished Hymer nodded gravely.

"You have returned in the nick of time," he said. "Your father has been dangerously ill."

Akon sprang up, but the priest raised his hand.

"There is no longer need for anxiety on that score, Prince. The King is out of danger, and you shall see him presently. The trouble is this. While he was ill and while I was engaged in tending him and preventing those fool doctors from poisoning him with their drugs, Odan has been at his old game. He has been raising the brown men against us."

"The dog!" growled Akon, and there was a glare in his eyes that was new to Martin.

"Dog he was born: dog he will die," said Hymer. "But if we, too, are not to die the death of dogs, we must act, and act quickly. The truth is, Prince, that Odan both hates and fears me. He knows that I have done away with the old rites—the burnings and the rest. He knows that the King, your father, is on my side, and that you are my pupil. Therefore he dares to pit himself against me."

"What forces has he?" demanded Akon.

"More than we have," was the grim reply. "The brown men are fools. They are filled with the old superstitions. They will follow him."

"Then what do you advise?" asked Akon quickly.

The priest pointed to Martin.

“Our hope lies there,” he answered. “The boat that flies, the tubes that shoot lead, and the rest of the wonders from the East.”

Martin flushed.

“B-but there are only two of us,” he stammered—“myself and the Professor.”

“It is not numbers that count,” replied Hymer gravely. “These brown men, the descendants of the old people, are full of strange fears and superstitions. Already the sight of men flying has driven terror into their hearts, and they have hidden themselves in their houses. You will return to the Island of Fire and bring back the guns of which Akon speaks. With these you can strike terror from the sky. But you must go at once, or it will be too late.”

Martin sprang to his feet. There was an eager gleam in his eyes. At that very moment a blaze of white light illuminated the room, and there was a crash so tremendous that the whole massive building quivered. Then darkness fell like night, the heavens opened, and cataracts of rain roared upon the roof.

Martin gave a low whistle of dismay.

“That puts the hat on it!” he muttered. Then, seeing the puzzled look on the faces of the others, “I mean,” he explained, “that I cannot fly back until the storm is over.”

The priest shook his head. “That is bad,” he said. “Haste means everything in this case.”

“You forget,” put in Akon quickly. “The storm will also delay the return of the fleet.”

“For a little, perhaps,” replied Hymer gravely. “But there is no wind to hinder them. They will be in before nightfall.”

“How long do these storms last?” asked Martin.

“An hour—two perhaps,” answered the priest.

Martin’s face cleared. “Then do not worry. It is not yet mid-day, and I can go and return within three hours.”

Hymer raised his shaggy eyebrows. “That is great speed,” he said.

“The flying boat moves more quickly than the wind, priest,” Akon answered him. “No bird flies so swiftly.”

“And as my friend cannot return until the storm ceases,” he added, “I beg you to take me to my father.”

The priest rose. “That is well said. I know that the King wishes greatly to see you.”

He led the way to the door. Martin stood aside, but Akon took him gently by the arm. “My father will wish to thank you in person for your goodness to his son,” he told him.

It was a relief to leave the priest’s room. The roar of the tropical rain upon the roof window was deafening, the constant glare of the electric fire blinding in its intensity, while the crackle of thunder never ceased. Outside in the passage these sounds were deadened. But as they moved down the long stone-walled corridor, a new sound reached Martin’s ears—a strange whistling, a note resembling the escape of steam from the boiler of a railway engine, but infinitely deeper and more powerful.

This grew steadily louder and louder until the whole place seemed to vibrate with the tremendous note of it. Martin could not imagine what caused it, but even the sound did not prepare him for the amazing sight which presently burst upon his eyes.

Hymer opened a door, and suddenly they stood upon a broad gallery which ran all round a vast circular pit, or arena, the bottom of which was, perhaps, a hundred feet beneath them. And from the center of this pit rose a blue flame roaring upwards, exactly like one of those blow lamps used by plumbers, only with a force and fury that were almost incredible.

The pit was open to the outer air, and seemed to be roofed by the blue-black thunder cloud. Yet so tremendous was the force of the flame that the rain, falling though it in solid sheets, made no more difference to it than a summer shower would to a blast furnace.

Martin stopped short. “Natural gas!” he said.

“It is the fire fountain,” said Akon simply. “It has burnt always. It will burn for ever. The brown folk believe it to be the breath of God.”

He hurried on; and Martin, though he longed to stop, had to follow. The gallery was roofed, so they were safe from the rain. Right across they went to the far side, and through another door guarded by two gold-helmeted sentries.

“This is the house of the King,” said Akon; and indeed Martin could well believe it. The beauty of the place fairly took his breath. Wonderful furniture, carved in a jet-black wood like ebony, and set with ivory and gold; statues, lifesize, and molded apparently in solid gold; skins of strange

beasts lay underfoot; the hangings of the walls were of the same rich purple as the priest's robe.

Akon saw Martin staring at these beauties. He shrugged his great shoulders.

"Children's toys," he said scornfully; "but needful to impress these foolish folk over whom we rule."

Martin thought to himself that one or two of these toys would make all the difference to the poor people who had been ruined by his father's scoundrelly partner Willard, but, before he could speak, the priest struck with his hand upon a tall door. It opened, and a grave, elderly man beckoned them to enter.

The room was of great size and very high and airy. It was lighted by lamps burning a perfumed oil. But Martin had no eyes for anything or anyone except for the splendid old man who lay back in a great chair opposite. He was tall as Akon himself, but his thick hair was white as snow, his cheeks were wrinkled, and his hands gnarled. Only his eyes, blue as the sea, were still clear and keen.

At sight of Akon his face lit up. As for Akon, he was across the room in three strides, and father and son seized one another's hands. It did Martin good to watch the delight they took in meeting again. There was nothing of king and prince about it. The two might have been just simple commoners instead of rulers over this wonderful island and its ancient people.

Then Akon beckoned Martin to come up, and again said such nice things about him that the boy's ears burned.

"He is going to help us," Akon told his father. "He will bring the wisdom of the East to defeat Odan."

The king began to question Martin. He was as eager as Akon himself. Like Akon, he believed that the *Bat* was enough in itself to turn the scale against Odan and his rebels.

"But I must have guns, sir," said Martin. "We have a machine-gun at the island and plenty of ammunition. And I will bring some bombs, too—fire-balls that will explode as they strike the earth," he explained.

Hymer suddenly interrupted. "Pardon, King," he said in his deep voice. "The storm is over. The youth should be returning."

Martin turned quickly. "You are right. I must go at once if I am to be back before night."

“Go, and fortune be with you,” said the King. “Akon, attend our friend to his flying ship.”

They hurried out. The storm had passed, roaring, to the west. The sun shone hotly on the steaming soil. Then, as they gained the open, Akon started, while an angry growl came from Hymer’s throat.

There was good reason for their dismay. The fleet was already in the harbor, and Odan’s great longship mooring opposite to the boat-house in which lay the *Bat*.

XIII. THE CHANCE PASSES

Martin did not hesitate a second. He made a rush down the broad staircase.

Out shot Akon's great hand to stop him, but, long as his arm was, it failed to reach the boy. His one idea was to reach the boat house and save his beloved plane before it fell into the clutches of Odan and his crew.

He heard Hymer the priest growl out a curt order, and was conscious in a vague sort of way that Prince Akon was at his heels. He even heard Akon shout to him to stop, yet paid no attention. There was no room in his mind for anything but the peril which threatened the *Bat*.

Next moment he was on the wharf, and, taking the steps in two jumps reached the float beside which lay the *Bat*. As he stooped to cast off the ropes which moored her bow and stern he heard Odan's great roaring voice bellowing out orders. Though he could not understand what was said he had little doubt of its meaning. He worked with feverish haste, but, quick as he was, before he had the second rope unfastened a boat bumped hard against the outer end of the float, and men came leaping off her on to the King's barge which lay alongside the plane.

Martin realized that his chance had passed. Straightening himself swiftly, he sprang back against the wall and drew his automatic.

"Come on, the lot of you!" he shouted.

Four men were almost on him. But they were not Norse; these were smaller men, with brown faces and dark eyes. They wore no armor, and carried spears, not swords. They had not the pluck of the Norsemen either, or perhaps it was superstition on their part that kept them from coming to close quarters. Anyhow, they stopped short, and stood in a semi-circle around Martin.

Again came Odan's bellow, then he himself leaped upon the float, making it surge beneath his ponderous weight. His chill blue eyes blazed with anger, and his short, straight sword was raised high above Martin's head.

Quick as a flash Martin flung up his pistol. For an instant he was minded to shoot the dangerous brute through the head, and finish the business then and there. Yet somehow he could not bring himself to do so. Instead, he aimed straight at the wide shining blade.

Martin was a good shot, and of late had had plenty of practice. Even so it was luck as much as skill which caused his first bullet to strike the blade plumb in the center and not three inches above the hilt.

The result was instantaneous. The weapon was knocked out of Odan's grasp as though it had been struck with a mallet. At the same time the impact numbed the giant's right arm, and it dropped useless to his side.

For a moment the great Norseman stood as if struck to stone, while his men, paralyzed by what seemed to them a miracle, shrank away. Then, pulling himself together, Odan leaped forward again, fairly bellowing with rage.

Before he could take a single step, a spear came whizzing past Martin's head, and struck full upon the big man's breastplate. The spear glanced on the polished plate without penetrating, yet so great was the force of the blow that it staggered the giant. He lost his balance, stepped backwards over the edge of the float, and disappeared into the harbor with a resounding splash.

Akon's hand fell on Martin's shoulder.

"Come! Come quickly!" he cried; and in a moment Martin and the prince were racing back towards the temple.

At the top of the temple steps Martin turned angrily on Akon.

"What did you do that for? Why did you drag me away?"

"To save your life," replied Akon dryly. "Mine, too, for the matter of that."

"Those brown men would never have dared to touch us," retorted Martin indignantly.

"Perhaps not. But did you not see? Odan's own bodyguard was close behind him. And they are of our own breed. See! They have pulled Odan out of the water."

"Come into the temple." It was Hymer, the priest, who spoke, and, drawing them inside, he pulled over the lever which closed the vast stone doors.

For a moment the three looked at one another in silence.

“What’s to be done now?” demanded Martin resentfully. He was desperately sore at losing the *Bat*.

“The next move is with Odan,” said Hymer.

“Can’t we attack them before they all get ashore?” asked Martin. “Surely that is our only chance.”

Hymer shrugged his vast shoulders. “We have not two score men all told, while Odan has as many hundreds. Boy, you should have killed Odan with your fire-shooter instead of striking the sword from his hand. But you are young, and I do not blame you. Wait here while I go to the look-out post above, and discover what Odan is about.”

Akon and Martin were left alone in the priest’s room. The walls were much too thick for them to hear anything of what was going on outside, and the only window was the skylight.

“Our chances look pretty slim,” said Martin, in English, then, seeing Akon’s puzzled look, explained as best he could.

“Matters have been working up to this point for years,” Akon told him. “As Hymer has told you, the brown men cling to their ancient rites, which are brutal and terrible. My father was always against them, and when he became king endeavored to put an end to them.”

“We Northern men are split into two branches. Odan is the head of the other branch, and has always desired to make himself king. He hates my father and myself, and Hymer too, who has been my father’s friend from the beginning.”

“We Northmen are very few in number compared with the ancient people, who were here from the beginning; and Odan, aware of this, has curried favor with the brown men and has married one of their women. It was he who led the attacks upon the Island of Fire. My father and I had no wish to take part in them, although on the last occasion I was forced to accompany Odan.”

Martin was listening eagerly. All this was new to him.

Akon paused a moment, and went on:

“My father’s illness and my absence have given Odan his chance. Without doubt he meant to kill me, then to return here to murder my father and make himself king.”

“But why didn’t he do it before?” asked Martin. “You say he has all the brown men behind him.”

“Yes; but we have Hymer, and he has been worth an army to us. The brown men, as he has told you, are soaked in superstition. They are afraid of Hymer, yet they hate him because he has abolished many of the old rites. Odan has worked upon this feeling. He has even drawn many of our own men away from us. Now they are ripe for revolt; and I fear that the fact of your plane having fallen into their hands will prove the turning point.”

He rose suddenly to his feet. His quiet face was suddenly aglow.

“But we will fight them,” he cried. “We will not submit tamely to the tyranny of Odan!”

Martin sprang up too.

“I am with you, Akon,” he answered. “I am with you. Between us we’ll get ahead of that old ruffian.”

The door opened, and Hymer came in.

“Odan is holding a meeting in the great square,” he said. “He has told the people that the king is in league with the wizards from the East. He vows he is no longer fit to rule, and has asked them to proclaim him regent.”

“Then it is war—war to the knife,” said Akon gravely. “Let us tell my father.”

The party within the palace had not long to wait for Odan’s next move. Two messengers appeared carrying green boughs, which were the Lemurian equivalent for the white flag. These men were brought into the room where the king himself awaited them, with Akon, Hymer, and Martin seated behind him.

They made obeisance, then stood before the king. They were both Norsemen; and Martin noticed that neither of them looked quite comfortable.

The king sat looking at them in contemptuous silence.

The elder of the two, a hard-looking man of fifty, with a narrow forehead and heavy, stubborn jaw, took a step forward.

“King, we bear a message from the chief Odan. He bids us say that the people are angry because you and the Prince Akon have given friendship to the wizards from the East. He wishes no harm to you or the prince, but to warn you that he, as commander of the army, cannot hold his men longer unless you renounce the wizard and give back to the people their old rites. I have spoken.”

The king raised his silvered head, and fixed his piercing eyes on the envoy.

"Since when has Odan dared to dictate to his king?" he asked sternly.

The envoy was silent, and the king went on.

"In what way does Odan desire that I should renounce the wizard?" he asked sarcastically. "May the king not hear the orders of his subject?"

A dull red flush rose to the cheeks of the envoy, and his voice was thick with badly suppressed rage.

"O King," he said, "the will of the people is that the flying wizard should undergo the ordeal by fire, according to the ancient customs of the island."

Dead silence in the great room. Every eye was upon Martin. As for Martin himself, a chill crept down his spine.

The ordeal by fire! The words drummed through his brain, and though no one had told him the exact nature of the ordeal, he had little real doubt about it. Quite clearly it was closely connected with the spouting flame of the gas well.

The king sat as if turned to stone, his eyes fixed upon the envoys. As for Akon, anger and grief struggled upon his fine face. Martin knew that they were both longing to help him, yet for some reason unable to do so.

The pause seemed to Martin to last an age. Really it was only a matter of a few seconds. Then Hymer stepped forward.

"Hear me, O men of Odan!" he said, in his deep voice. "On behalf of the white man from the East, whom ye term wizard, I accept the challenge. Tomorrow at the hour of noon he shall tread the path of fire. I have spoken."

XIV. ORDEAL BY FIRE

“You will strip to the skin, bathe yourself in the fluid in this bath, then wait until you are dry and dress yourself in these garments,” said Hymer to Martin. “When you are dressed, and just before the door opens, you will step upon this stone which you see is covered with a gray powder. Rub your feet thoroughly in the powder, so that the soles are completely covered with it. Then come forth, and follow the path.”

“Be not afraid,” he added gravely.

Before Martin could say a word, he had passed out through a door at the back of the room of preparation, and Martin was left alone.

To say that Martin was happy or comfortable would be stretching the truth dangerously. His heart was thumping, and he had a nasty sinking feeling at the pit of the stomach.

Little wonder, for the small dressing-room in which he stood was filled with the deep droning of the fire fountain, and the solid ground beneath him vibrated under its rushing tide of fire.

Around the flame spout—Akon had shown it to him on the previous evening—at a distance of no more than ten or a dozen yards, ran a raised pathway of stone; and the nature of the ordeal was that he had to tread this path, making a complete circle of the fire.

How such a thing was possible, how he could accomplish such a feat and live, was beyond Martin’s understanding. Talk of a burning, fiery furnace—why, the heat at such close range would scorch the very flesh from his bones.

Yes, he was badly scared, yet, with the inborn pluck which was his, he had no thought of trying to escape the ordeal. To attempt it was the only way of saving Akon and his father from the fury of Odan. If he failed, well, then, he was a dead man, but at any rate he would have died with the feeling that he had done his duty; if by any miracle he succeeded, then the whole case was changed. The half-savage Lemurians would turn upon Odan, and the revolution would be at an end.

These were the thoughts that passed through his mind as he proceeded to follow out the chief priest's instructions. He stripped off his drill jacket and breeches, his boots and puttees, and all his clothes. As he laid them over the back of a bench he wondered grimly if he would ever wear them again. Then he got into the great stone bath filled with clear, cool water which had a curious silky feel, and a peculiar but not unpleasant odor. When he got out his skin prickled slightly and had a strangely soft feeling. It was no hardship to wait until he was dry, for the place was almost uncomfortably warm.

The clothes which Hymer had left him were of a white material, resembling wool, but very thick and heavy. The outer garment was like a dressing gown, belted at the waist, and coming down to his ankles. There was a turban-like head-dress. Examining the stuff, Martin made up his mind that it was probably made of asbestos fibre, and therefore fireproof. It was quite clear that the priest was doing his best for him; yet, even so, Martin felt that no precautions could save him from the effects of that terrific, furnace-like heat.

He had just got into the dress when the inner door opened and Prince Akon entered. His forehead was knitted, and his brilliant blue eyes were full of anxiety.

Striding forward, he took Martin by both hands.

"My friend," he said sharply, "you must not do this thing. Take your pistol, and I will take my sword. With our men who are still faithful, we will fall upon Odan and slay him."

Martin looked up and smiled. Then he shook his head.

"Akon, you are one of the best," he said, "but you know as well as I do that it won't work. Odan's taking good care that we don't try any little surprise of that sort. It would only mean that the whole lot of us, including your father, would be wiped out. No; I'm trusting Hymer, and I'm going through with it."

Akon paused. He seemed to have some difficulty in speaking.

"You are very brave," he said at last. "And as I see that your mind is made up, I will not argue more. But this I promise—if harm comes to you, I myself will settle your debt. I will kill Odan."

"You'd much better sit tight and look after your father," returned Martin. "Once I am out of the way, Odan won't have any further cause for complaint. But, talking of debts, I want you to settle one or two of mine if

you can possibly manage it—I mean, in case I am not able to do it myself. Will you?"

"Tell me," replied Akon simply.

"In the first place," said Martin, "I want you to get news to the Professor, and if possible send my flying boat back to him."

"It shall be done," said Akon, "if I am alive to do it."

Martin laughed.

"You can't do it if you're dead. That's a sure thing. And now for the other business. You seem to have lots of gold here?"

"Next to tin and copper, it is our most plentiful metal," agreed Akon. "But of what use is gold to you?"

"None to me, personally. But it's worth a lot in my country. We use it for money, as I have told you before. Can you spare some?"

"A hundred men's load, if you so desire."

"Bless you, two or three will be enough. Now see here. My father died owing money. It was not his fault, but I want to pay it and so clear his memory. Now, on this paper I have written down the name of the man who will pay these debts for me. He is our man of law. Give the gold and this paper to the Professor; and I know that he will manage the business for me if he ever gets back home again."

"It shall be done," repeated Akon; and as he spoke the deep thunder of a metal gong rose above the shrill whistle of the fire fountain. He started up.

"That is the signal!" he exclaimed. "The door is about to open."

"Then I must rub my feet in this powder," said Martin quickly; and, springing on the stone, he proceeded to do so.

Next moment the outer door, worked by invisible levers, swung slowly open.

One last grip of Akon's hand, then Martin stepped out into the arena. A path, white and smooth like the one which circled the gas geyser, led straight from the door. For a moment Martin paused and glanced around him.

Now he became aware that there were no fewer than three separate galleries surrounding the immense circle, and that each of these was packed almost to suffocation. There were many thousands of people both brown skinned and white, but the brown men were much more numerous. And all

these thousands of pairs of eyes were centered upon the boy who stood alone, robed in white, on the pathway beneath them.

Not a sound did they make. The hush was broken only by the steady blast of the gas fountain in the centre. Seen from below, this spout of fire was even more terrible and impressive than as Martin had first seen it from above. The shaft from which it rose seemed to be about two feet across; and close to the ground the pressure was so great that the flame was invisible. It appeared first at about a man's height from the ground, and here it was blue and almost transparent. Higher up it broadened and turned yellow, and from that white, until, near its towering summit, it was a great umbrella-like shape of incandescent gas.

As it happened the day was overcast, a rare thing in that part of the world, and against the canopy of dull cloud overhead the flame gleamed with intolerable brilliance, throwing up into strongest relief all those thousands of strained faces that lined the tiers of galleries.

Two faces in all that crowd Martin saw as he looked swiftly round. One was the King's, grave yet splendid under its thick thatch of silver hair; the other Odan's. The King sat upon a raised seat on the north side of the highest gallery; Odan in a great chair, exactly opposite. And Odan's fierce eyes gleamed with a savage delight which filled Martin with sudden remorse that he had not taken his chance on the previous day, and killed the evil beast.

All this he took in within a few seconds. Then, with head erect, he walked steadily along the path.

At every step the heat increased. Before he was half-way across the space separating him from the fire fountain it had become almost intolerable. It was upon his face that he felt the worst of it. The clothes with which Hymer had provided him were clearly made of a non-conducting substance. They protected his body completely. With a quick movement he pulled his head-dress more closely over his face, and moved on.

Now he was within thirty paces of the flame, and it took every ounce of will-power and resolution he possessed to keep going. If it were like this now, what would it be by the time he reached the path itself? Could flesh and blood carry him so far?

His head spun, his pace slackened in spite of himself. All that he was conscious of was the hideous roaring of the flame and the intolerable heat

which beat upon him. He was in such torture that the mad idea came upon him to rush forward, hurl himself into the flame itself, and so end his pain.

Five steps more, and his senses were rapidly leaving him. Then—was he dreaming or was it really true?—the mighty pillar of flame seemed to flicker like a candle in a draught. The deep-toned whistle was cut short, and before his astonished eyes the whole thing went out like a blown candle.

For an instant Martin was unable to trust his senses. He stood perfectly still. Then like a flash it came to him that this might be only a temporary respite, and that if he did not hurry the flame might burst out again.

On he went, reached the white circle, and with long but steady strides marched round it. Though the stone was almost red hot beneath him he hardly noticed it. In some strange way the powder saved his skin from burning. He completed the circle, turned deliberately, and marched back towards the edge of the arena amid a silence that was like death. Hardly was he half-way back before, with a screech like a hundred steam whistles, the pent up gas broke loose again, and the flame went soaring to the skies.

But loud as was its roar, it was nothing to the thunder of shouting which burst from ten thousand throats, and sent echoes crashing to and fro across the vast arena.

Martin paid no attention. Now that the strain was over, he began to feel how terrible it had been. He was sick and giddy, and his one idea was to reach the dressing-room before he collapsed.

As he got to the door he felt himself staggering, but before he fell Akon's strong arms seized him, and the splendid young Norseman set him gently in a chair and put a cup to his lips.

What it contained Martin did not know, but it was exquisitely cool and fresh, and must have been a strong tonic into the bargain, for he felt new life flowing in his veins.

"Is—is it all right?" he panted out.

"You did splendidly," Akon told him. "Even the flame could not destroy one so brave as you."

"Nonsense!" said Martin pettishly. "Who was it that turned the tap off just at the right moment?"

Akon gazed at him blankly; and it came to Martin, with a strange shock, that the prince actually believed a miracle had happened.

He changed the subject quickly.

“Now I hope they’ll let me go home,” he said.

Akon looked at him gravely.

“I fear not,” he answered. “Listen to them shouting! They are crying for you to be their leader in place of Odan.”

For once Martin came very near losing his temper.

“They want me to be their chief in place of Odan!” he exclaimed. “Did anyone ever hear such foolishness? Akon, I am going down to the *Bat* this minute, and I shall be away at Lost Island before they know I am gone.”

As he spoke he sprang up.

But he had miscalculated his strength. He had not in the least realized how tremendous had been the strain of the last twenty minutes. He stood swaying a moment, then collapsed, and Akon was just in time to catch him as he fell.

XV. THE POWDER PLOT

The next thing Martin knew he was lying on a most comfortable couch, in a big, airy room. For a moment he could not imagine where he was. Then, as he stared vaguely about, his wandering eyes fell upon Hymer the priest, who sat in a chair close by.

“Hulloa!” he said weakly.

The priest turned with a smile.

“So you are awake. How is it with you?”

“All right,” answered Martin. Then, remembering, “Oh, I don’t know! I fainted. What a silly thing to do!”

“A thing that most others would have done before instead of after the ordeal,” said Hymer dryly.

Then, as Martin tried to sit up, the priest stretched out his hand.

“Not so, my friend. You will lie still for the present.”

“But I must be off,” said Martin impatiently. “I have to get back to the other island.”

“You cannot fly in the darkness,” Hymer told him quietly. “It is now night.”

“You don’t mean that I have been lying here like a log all these hours?” returned Martin, horrified.

“You have slept these eight hours past,” said the priest. But he did not add that he had given Martin a draught brewed from poppy juice to keep him asleep, nor did he tell him that the medicine was probably the one thing that had saved him from serious illness.

“My friend,” he went on, “I ask that you will remember I am your doctor, and that I desire you to remain quiet until to- morrow. Thanks to your courage when you faced the fire, there is at present no danger to yourself or to the rest of us. Your flying boat is safe, and will be well guarded, and I will take it upon myself that word shall be sent of your safety to your friends on the Island of Fire.”

“And when shall I be able to go?” demanded Martin.

“That matter we will discuss later,” Hymer answered. “For the present I desire that you sleep.”

As he spoke he fixed his eyes upon Martin’s face, and there was something so strangely compelling in their gaze that Martin felt he must obey. For a moment or two he struggled, but the effort was useless. An intense drowsiness came over him, his eyes closed, and in a few minutes he was sound asleep.

When he awoke for a second time it was broad day, and the sun was streaming through a soft, rose-colored curtain which covered the window of the room. He felt extraordinarily well and very hungry.

Sitting up in bed, he looked about. Instantly a thick curtain at the far end of the room was pushed aside and a brown man entered, carrying a tray with food upon it. He bowed deeply, placed the tray on a table beside the couch, and, bowing again, departed.

Martin lost no time in sampling his Lemurian breakfast. There was a large and beautifully shaped bowl full of some steaming mixture which he recognized at once as chocolate—at least, it was made from the cocoa bean, but flavored with something quite different from vanilla, and even nicer. There was fresh bread made of white maize flour, very light and sweet. Besides this, there was a dish of most excellent broiled mullet and fruit of several varieties, including custard-apple and Brazilian jack-fruit.

It was a meal that could not have been bettered by the chef of the finest hotel in New York, and Martin did not leave much of it. He had just finished when the servant came again, this time bringing a large pitcher full of water, a great brass bowl, and a quantity of clothes.

Martin realized that he was to get up and dress, but, to his dismay, his own clothes were missing, and the servant indicated by signs that he was to wear those he had brought, and which turned out to be the same sort as those worn by Akon.

Martin did not half like it. It began to look as if he were not going to get away very easily. However, it was Hobson’s choice, so at last he got into the new rig, and looking at himself in a great mirror of polished metal, which was fastened against the wall, could not help seeing that he made rather a fine figure in the white tunic, golden breast-plate, and gold-buckled sandals.

He was barely dressed before Akon came in and greeted him warmly. Martin at once began to remonstrate about his clothes, but Akon only

smiled.

"Your own things are safe," he assured him. "It is necessary, however, that you should wear these garments for the present."

Suddenly he turned grave.

"Thanks to you," he continued, "the danger is over for the moment, but only for the moment. As long as Odan lives there is no real safety for any of us."

"The fellow is a traitor," said Martin scornfully. "Why do you not try him and hang him?"

"Our laws do not permit of it, my friend," he answered. "I have prayed my father to allow me to challenge and meet him in single combat. But he refuses his consent. Now come with me to the king. We have to plan for the future."

Hymer was with the king, and it did not take Martin long to give them his idea. Briefly it was that they should set to work and make gunpowder. He described the ingredients which he required. Though they had no guns, he believed that a good supply of fireworks would impress the superstitious Lemurians.

"Charcoal, yes; sulphur, yes." Hymer ticked them off on his fingers as he spoke, "But the other—saltpetre, you call it—that I do not know."

"I am sure we can make it," Martin answered eagerly. "Where do you get your salt?" Hymer told him that there was a salt-pan in the interior of the island, and Martin was delighted, for saltpetre, which is sodium nitrate, is frequently found in salt-pans.

Hymer jumped at the notion. There was plenty of sulphur. Charcoal, of course, could be made with ease. The only ingredient he was not sure about was the nitre, or saltpetre. Once the decision was taken, the priest declared that there was no time to waste. He sent trusted men to get the sulphur from some hot springs about five miles from the capital. Others were told off to prepare the charcoal; then he and Martin set out for the salt-pan.

As it was not the custom for the high priest to walk abroad, they went in litters, carried by brown men. The salt-pan was in a wild, desolate part of the island beneath a range of low, rugged hills full of deep caves. To his dismay, Martin found no trace of saltpetre.

"Never mind," he said. "We can make it. The earth beneath any stable will yield nitre."

“Oh, I forgot,” he added in dismay. “You have no horses here, and no stables. We shall have to try in some of the caves. What about these?”

Hymer looked suddenly grave.

“Not these caves, my friend,” he answered. “Even I, who am not by nature a coward, have never ventured into their depths. They are inhabited by beasts not wholesome for man to meet.”

Martin was full of curiosity, but for once he could get no information out of the priest.

“I only pray,” said Hymer very gravely, “that you may never make nearer acquaintance with the monsters of the caverns.”

“But we must have the saltpetre,” declared Martin.

“There are other caves,” replied Hymer. “But I will not speak of them here. Let us return.”

He gave orders to the carriers, and they lifted the litters and carried them back to the city by the sea. It was not until the two were alone again in the priest’s own room that Hymer spoke.

“The caves of which I speak are beneath our feet,” he said.

A sudden idea flashed into Martin’s head.

“Beneath our feet,” he repeated. “Tell me, Hymer, does one of them by any chance communicate with the shaft of the gas well?”

The priest started slightly. There was something half suspicious in the glance he cast on Martin.

“What do you mean?” he asked, after a moment’s pause.

“Surely it is plain!” said Martin. “I am not foolish enough to believe that the flame went out of itself yesterday.”

Hymer looked round cautiously. He lowered his voice.

“I hardly dare to speak it aloud,” he answered. “It would be death to us all if it came to the ears of Odan or of his followers. Even Prince Akon and his father do not know the secret.”

“But I can guess it,” smiled Martin. “You have some form of cap or extinguisher which you can push forward into the funnel.”

“Truly nothing is hidden from the wisdom of the East,” said Hymer. “Come then, and I will take you into the caverns below the temple. You shall see the secret device of my ancestor, Grun the priest, and mayhap find the burning salt of which we are in need. Follow me.”

He pressed a spring in the floor. A trap door opened, showing a flight of steps leading down into darkness. First lighting a small lamp, Hymer led

the way. Down they went into the very depths of the earth until they reached a narrow passage cut in the solid rock. The air was thick and heavy and damp, and a curious white efflorescence coated the roof and walls.

Martin stopped.

“This is what we want,” he said eagerly.

But Hymer only signed urgently for silence, and moved steadily forward.

Presently a deep droning began to make itself heard. Martin knew it at once for the sound of the gas well. The sound grew louder; there was a suffocating smell of gas.

The passage opened out into a small rock chamber. Here Hymer stopped, and from a shelf cut in the rock took a cloth, which he dipped in water standing in an earthen jar.

“Place this over your face,” he said, handing it to Martin.

Martin did so, and they went on again. Now the roaring was deafening, and, by the light of the lamp Martin saw that the passage ended in a shaft, the sides of which were polished like glass by the age-long drive of the rushing vapor. He saw, too, that close to the shaft lay a sort of truck on wheels, which was heaped with sand.

Hymer stopped. He put his lips close to Martin’s ear.

“Is there need to explain?” he asked.

“No,” replied Martin. “I understand perfectly. The truck is pushed forward and the sand tipped down the shaft. It is very simple, but very well thought of.”

The roar of the spouting gas deadened all other sounds. It must have been some inner sense of danger that made Martin suddenly swing round.

The sight froze him. Barely ten paces behind, the gigantic form of Odan blocked the passage. The giant stood watching them with a cruel smile on his lips.

XVI. MARTIN PLAYS A LONE HAND

For seconds that seemed like minutes the silence of the deep tunnel was broken only by the shriek of the spouting gas. Martin's eyes were glued upon the face of Odan, who stood as motionless as himself, still with that smile of cruel triumph on his great, beast-like face.

Hymer broke the spell. His lips were close to Martin's ear.

"Your fire-shooter," the priest said urgently. "Kill him. It is our only chance."

Martin knew it. Like a flash his hand dropped to his pocket—or rather to where his pocket had been. For the moment he had completely forgotten his change of clothes. Instead of the rough tweed of his Norfolk jacket, his hand met the soft stuff of his Lemurian tunic. "I haven't got it," he answered dully. "It's in my other things."

"Your knife, then." And without an instant's pause the priest drew his own, a dagger of bronze with a broad, leaf-shaped blade, keen as fine steel and very nearly as hard.

Dagger in right hand, lamp in left, Hymer made a quick rush at Odan.

For an instant Odan seemed to hesitate, to be making up his mind whether to hold his ground, and meet his old enemy face to face. But only for an instant. Then he turned, and was off up the tunnel with such strides as made pursuit seem hopeless.

Hopeless so far as Hymer's short square frame was concerned, and he knew it. Martin, close behind him, saw the priest raise his hand above his head and caught the gleam of the lamplight on the yellow blade of the dagger as it whizzed through the air. Like a flash of golden fire it struck Odan true and straight between his vast shoulders, but only to fall ringing from his armor to the floor.

Hymer stopped short. He could run no more. Martin heard the panting breath wheeze from his lungs as he himself shot past. He had found his knife, and, reckless of consequences, ran fiercely on the trail of Odan, resolved to stop him or to perish in the attempt.

Next moment Odan had vanished round a bend in the passage. Martin caught the flash of his golden armor as he thundered round the curve. Still he followed, but only to find himself in pitch darkness. Hymer had the lamp. Once out of the radius of its light, the passage was black as a starless night.

But he could still hear the heavy clank of the giant's metal-shod feet, and he pressed on blindly in pursuit.

Suddenly his foot caught in something lying on the floor across his path, he pitched forward, and fell with stunning force upon the stone floor of the passage.

Hymer's anxious voice roused him.

"N-no. It—it's nothing," said Martin thickly. "A bit bruised, and all the breath knocked out of me. W-where's Odan?"

"Gone," answered Hymer in a tone of angry despair. "And with him have gone all our hopes for the future."

"How on earth did he get in?" asked Martin.

"I cannot tell. I fear treachery. Some of the palace or temple servants may be secretly in his pay."

"Well, if he has gone, it can't be helped," said Martin quietly. He was beginning to recover from the stunning effects of his fall which had been caused by Odan's cloak cunningly dropped across Martin's path. "What we have to do now is to repair the damage as best we may."

"You do not understand," said Hymer, and his voice more than his words made Martin understand how desperate was the case. "Our one hold over the brown men has been their superstition. As Master of the Fire, they feared even if they hated me. By this time Odan is telling them how they have been tricked. Their rage will be terrible."

"We shall have to fight for it!"

"Fight!" repeated the priest bitterly. "How can we fight? A few score against thousands!"

Martin looked hard at Hymer. He had never seen the strong-faced priest in such despair. It did not seem to him that matters were any worse than they had been a couple of days earlier. Personally, he had no idea of taking it lying down.

"Cheer up!" he said. "You are forgetting that we can make gunpowder; that ought to be as good magic as anything else. Let's get back and set to work. I don't fancy these brown men will stand before bombs."

Hymer lifted his heavy eyes.

"Boy," he said quietly, "you put shame upon me. Let us do as you suggest. There may yet be a chance to defeat this evil one."

If Hymer had seemed for the moment to lose heart, Martin soon found that he had not lost his energy. Once back in the temple he sent messengers this way and that. He collected his forces, and had the gates closed and guarded. Next he brought together a score of workmen, including several who were skilled in smelting metal.

To these he interpreted Martin's directions as to making the metal receptacles for bombs. Having seen them started, Martin took others and went down into the tunnel to collect saltpetre.

The sulphur and charcoal had already been prepared, and before night everything was under way. Martin himself undertook the making of the gunpowder. Saltpetre has first to be washed so as to free it from chloride. This Martin had to do himself. But the men under him were, he found, quite capable of powdering the sulphur and of distilling the charcoal. He used the brown, or "red," charcoal, which makes a very high explosive, much too powerful for use in a gun-barrel. As he had no books to consult it was fortunate that he had the exact proportions fixed in his memory. He used seventy-nine parts of saltpetre, eighteen of charcoal, and three of sulphur.

There was little sleep for any of them that night. Haste was everything. They had no idea what Odan was about, but he might attack at any minute. Martin snatched a nap while the powder was drying, a process which takes about three hours. He had no thermometer, but felt safe in leaving the explosive in charge of the priest who was keenly interested in the whole process.

Next morning the town still seemed quiet, and after breakfast Martin set to making fuses. The Lemurian workmen had finished several score of neat bomb cases of different sizes.

One thing Martin was desperately anxious about. This was his flying boat. As Hymer had promised, a guard of Royalist troops had been set over her, where she lay in the boat-house. They were believed to be still there; but Martin was afraid that when night came they would be rushed or lured away.

The more he thought, the more anxious he became. The *Bat* was his only link between these lost islands and America. If anything happened to

her he could never build another. He might build the frame, perhaps, but not the engine.

As the hours went by the suspense grew worse and worse. Hymer had begged him to lie down and rest, but, tired as he was, he was too restless for that. At last, late in the evening, he went up to the look-out post on the roof of the vast dome. The great ball of the sun was dipping behind the black barrier of weed far in the west, and its crimson light shone slantingly over the town, and turned the calm water of the harbor to the color of blood.

He stood there, staring in the direction of the boat-house. He could see no one. There did not appear to be a soul on guard, or anywhere near the boat-house. The idea came to him that the guard had deserted, and on the heels of that thought followed a sudden resolve. He determined to go and fetch the *Bat*. There was a lake within the Temple grounds on which he could alight.

He turned quickly and hurried down the winding stair.

By this time Martin knew his way about the vast building. He had learned that there was a side door opening on to a road bordered by thick trees. It was the way by which the King went to the harbor.

Martin did not go straight to this door. First he visited his room and hid two bombs and his pistol in his clothes. Then he went quietly to the door, which he found guarded like all the other doors, but the guards, seeing Martin in his royal dress, simply saluted and made no attempt to stop him. By the time he had got outside the sun was down and the darkness falling swiftly.

The road appeared to be deserted. But though Martin's whole mind was set upon the *Bat*, he was not taking unnecessary risks. He walked in the centre of the road and kept a sharp look-out on all sides.

He saw no one. The silence was uncanny. There was not a sound except a curious low booming made by the nightjars swooping in pursuit of night-flying insects. The quiet air was heavy with the scent of orange and magnolia.

Walking quickly, it was only a few minutes before he reached the point where the road opened on the broad quay. Here he stopped again, and looked to right and left. But for any movement, Lemuria might have been a city of the dead.

Taking courage, Martin walked straight to the boat-house. He paused outside and listened. Not a sound came.

“As I thought,” he said to himself. “The beggars have got the wind up and cleared. It’s lucky I came.”

He walked down the steps. The door was open. In the fast thickening gloom he could just catch the outline of the *Bat* lying motionless on the smooth water.

“Ah, you beauty!” he said. “It won’t be long before I have you safe. And even old Hymer won’t find it in his heart to blame me when he sees the *Bat* inside the temple grounds.”

He stepped down on to the floating pontoon, and stooped to loosen the mooring ropes. He was in the very act of untying the first knot when, without the slightest sound or warning, something thick and soft dropped over his head, and at the same instant a pair of powerful arms gripped him round the waist.

He struggled furiously, kicking out with all his might. He tried to shout, but the thick folds of the blanket-like stuff cut off all sound. He gasped for breath, but could not fill his lungs.

His head seemed to swell to the size of a balloon; his struggles ceased. The last thing he was conscious of was the sound of a harsh, cruel laugh which penetrated faintly to his dazed brain. Then his senses left him, and he collapsed limply on the boards of the pontoon.

XVII. THE PLACE OF DEATH

When Martin came to himself he was lying on a couch in a strange room, a small, bare, cell-like place, the walls of which were built of cyclopean blocks of stone. The place was faintly lit by a lantern high overhead. His chest still felt sore and his mouth dry, otherwise he was none the worse.

"So they've got me!" he muttered half aloud. He sat up and instinctively felt for his pistol.

It was gone.

Of course he had expected this, but all the same it was a nasty shock. Suddenly he felt something round and smooth under his tunic. His heart beat hard as he remembered that these were his two little bombs. His searchers, not knowing what they were, or perhaps not noticing them at all, had passed them over.

"If the worse comes to the worst I'll get that old scoundrel Odan before they finish me," he said grimly.

He looked round and found food beside him—maize cakes and water. That was all.

"They don't mean to starve me, anyhow," he continued with a light smile. He was recovering his spirits and beginning to wonder what was going to happen.

He drank some water, ate a piece of the bread, and lay back, thinking hard. The place was quiet as death, and Martin had had a pretty stiff time of it for the last twenty-four hours. Before he knew it he was asleep, and when he woke again daylight was leaking through a barred window.

As Martin sat up and stretched himself he heard a slight grating sound; a bronze door slid back and two men entered his cell.

They were Norsemen, ugly-looking, hard-faced fellows. Martin stared hard at them. The expression on their faces rather amused him. It was a queer mixture between triumph and fright.

Evidently they were delighted at having the wizard in their power, but rather afraid lest he might vanish in a puff of smoke. For a moment Martin

thought of chucking one of his bombs at them and making a bolt; but he decided to wait for a better chance. Still the thought made him smile, and his smile made his two gaolers more uncomfortable still.

One stood guard with his sword ready, while the other beckoned Martin to follow. Martin decided he might as well do so; and his guide marched ahead, while the fellow with the drawn sword followed close behind.

They went down a long, stone-paved passage, descended some steps, and presently came into a sort of guard-room. In the middle of the place stood Odan, grim and gigantic. His thin lips were drawn back in an ugly grin, showing his walrus like tusks under his yellow mustache.

"So here is the sorcerer!" he sneered, and now he spoke in Norse which Martin understood.

"Yes, I'm here," replied Martin calmly. "And I should he glad if you would let me have a wash and some breakfast."

Martin's coolness seemed to upset the giant. He glared angrily. Then suddenly he laughed harshly.

"The little cock crows loud," he said. "Of our kindness we will grant the favors you ask—the more so since the food will be the last you will enjoy in this life."

"Hur, bring food!" he roared.

One of the men hurried out, and came back quickly with bread, cold meat, and a jug full of some sweetish, pungent drink with a flavor of honey in it.

Martin, knowing that he would need all his pluck and strength before the day was out, ate heartily. He was no longer frightened; he felt extraordinarily cool. He had made up his mind that he would keep quiet until actual violence was offered and then—then he would use his bombs.

He caught Odan looking at him with a certain curiosity in his cold eyes. The only virtue this primeval brute respected was bravery. It seemed that he was secretly astonished at Martin's coolness in the face of danger.

Breakfast over, Martin was placed in a litter, the curtains were drawn, and the bearers trotted off at a sharp pace.

The journey lasted for about an hour; then the litter stopped. The curtains which covered it were pulled sharply aside, and Martin blinked in the hot blaze of the tropical sun.

Glancing round, he recognized at once the part of the island to which he had been brought by Odan's men.

It was the valley of the salt pan, that desolate spot which he and Hymer had visited in their vain search for saltpetre. There was the salt pan glistening like snow under the torrid sun, and there were the low bare cliffs surrounding it. Not a green thing was in sight. The place was an abomination of desolation, and the blaze of light only made it look the worse.

All this Martin saw in a flash. The next thing he saw was that not only Odan was present, but also a large number of his followers, both white and brown. Among them all Martin did not find a single friendly face. The Norsemen were frankly hostile, the Lemurians sullenly so.

Martin sprang lightly to the ground and stood facing Odan. The giant glared at him.

"Sorcerer," he said, "once you and that juggler the priest Hymer have tricked us. In the ordeal that is before you to-day you will not have the help of Hymer."

He laughed as he spoke, and his laugh was like the sound of dry stones rattling down a barren beach. There was something horribly ominous about his threat, and in spite of all his pluck Martin felt a shiver crawl down his spine. But he shook off the feeling, and stared back at Odan with open contempt.

"You at least have plenty of help at hand, Odan," he answered scornfully. "One who did not know you might well suppose you feared me."

Odan ground his great teeth. Dull sparks seemed to flash in his cold blue eyes. He took a stride forward, and Martin thought he meant to attack. He hoped he would. His hand was under his tunic on a bomb. If Odan laid hands upon him, he meant to blow him to ribbons and trust to the moral effect on the others to make good his escape.

But Odan checked himself. He laughed again.

"Wizards," he said, with a heavy attempt at sarcasm, "are not as other men. They must be guarded more carefully. But these"—he waved his great hand—"these are only witnesses. It is they who will spread the news throughout the island that even the sorcerer from the West was not able to save himself from the Creature of the Cavern."

Again Martin felt that unpleasant chill upon him. But he shook it off. Whatever this new ordeal might be, he must face it fairly and squarely. It was not only his own life that was at stake, but the lives of Akon, of Hymer, of the King—and in the long run, no doubt, of Professor Distin himself, for once Odan was undisputed ruler of Lemuria the first thing he would do would be to lead his Armada against the other island.

Odan spoke again.

"This way, sorcerer," he said. "Walk, if you will. If you will not, you will go nevertheless."

Martin laughed.

The cool certainty with which he spoke impressed even Odan. Odan, remember, was steeped almost as deeply in superstition as the brown men themselves, and although he had managed to catch Hymer tripping over the fire fountain business, yet he had a secret belief that Martin really could work magic. The flying machine, to say nothing of the mysterious fog that night upon the island lake, had shaken him badly, and he was ready to believe that almost anything was possible to Martin.

Grunting angrily under his breath, he signed to Martin to follow, and led the way towards the cliff face. The rest, forming into double line, followed. No one spoke a word. The silence was broken only by the tramp of feet across the hard, dry ground.

The rude path that ran through the valley and which they followed led straight to the cliff face, ending in the arched mouth of a cave. It was the same cave which Martin had noticed on the occasion of his previous visit, and which he had wished to search for saltpetre. Hymer's words came back to him: "Beasts not wholesome for man to meet" inhabited the cave.

Once more he had to use all his will power to shake off the creeping horror that came over him. Next minute he had passed under the black arch.

"All hope abandon, ye who enter here," were the words that flashed through his brain, and truly the black, echoing gloom of the place was enough to try the strongest nerves. The procession halted a minute while torches were lit. Their red, smoky glare showed the passage sloping endlessly down into the bowels of the earth. Walls and roof were of a dark, heavy-colored rock; the roof was high and vaulted, while the floor was worn as though by the passage of many feet.

The procession moved steadily on. No one uttered a word, but the sound of their footsteps sent queer echoes whispering up and down the lofty

tunnel.

On they went until Martin reckoned they must be nearly a quarter of a mile from the entrance and several hundred feet below the level of the floor of the valley. Then the passage opened out into a vast cavern, so lofty that the torch-light failed to reach the roof. But in front the ruddy glare was reflected from something which presently Martin made out to be a sheet of water.

A few steps farther, and Odan stopped on the edge of this underground lake which stretched out in an unbroken sheet as far as the light reached. This lake had the appearance of a sheet of black glass, and appeared to be of fathomless depth. Not a ripple broke its surface.

"Come hither, wizard," said Odan.

Martin, holding his head high, stepped forward. He was watching Odan warily; he did not intend to be caught napping.

To his astonishment he saw a small boat under the ledge of rock that rimmed the lake.

"Now," said Odan grimly, "we are about to test your powers. You see before you a rock which rises from the water of the Lake of Death. This is the testing place. Row out, seat yourself upon the rock, remain there for half an hour, and if you are alive at the end of it, then—then we will acknowledge that you are indeed a wizard, and that your powers are greater than those of man."

Martin looked Odan full in the face.

"And supposing that, even without the help of Hymer the priest, I come safely through this ordeal, what then Odan? Have I your word to go free?"

Odan smiled dreadfully.

"You have, O sorcerer! You have my promise."

Martin nodded.

"That is well," he said calmly.

At once he stepped into the boat, and, picking up the paddle, drove the small craft swiftly across towards the blunt rock which rose out of the depths at a distance of perhaps thirty yards from the shore.

As he did so, a curious sound, a sort of thick sigh, rose from the watchers around the edge.

XVIII. THE WISDOM OF THE EAST

The sigh, caught by the vault of rock high in the darkness overhead, went whispering through the stillness of the cavern in a hideously uncanny fashion; and as Martin reached the rock the soft echoes were still murmuring through unseen depths of gloom.

Martin stepped out of his boat, tied the boat firmly to a projecting point of rock, and seated himself upon the highest point of the crag, which was something less than his own height above the water.

After that first sigh dead silence had fallen again on the crowd of watchers who stood on the shore of the subterranean lake. It seemed to Martin that they hardly breathed. The only sound that broke the stillness was the slight crackle of the torches which blazed steadily, flinging a blood red light upon the strained faces of the men and upon the ebony surface of the water.

The suspense was abominable, Martin knew by this time that the peril, whatever it was, would rise from the depths beneath him, yet even he was not prepared for the horror that was to come.

A minute dragged by—two. Each seemed an hour. Then Martin saw large bubbles rising to the surface of the smooth water. They shone iridescent in the torch glare, broke and vanished.

Next, ripples broke the jet-black mirror, and rolled slowly away to the edge, lapping, with a hollow sound, against the surrounding rocks.

Martin fixed his eyes upon the point from which they started, and almost at once the surface broke, and out of the abyss rose a head hideous beyond the wildest nightmare.

Dreadful as had been the monster of the lake in Lost Island, this was a thousand times worse. Shaped somewhat like that of a crocodile, the head was at least six feet in length but the jaws resembled rather the beak of a monstrous bird than those of the lizard tribe. They were solid bone, and were set with hundreds of teeth sharp as lancets and about three inches long.

Behind the teeth and set on each side of the vast scaly skull was a pair of eyes, each as large as a man's head and protected by a series of bony plates. These eyes were fixed on Martin with a pitiless glare. It flashed across him that their owner considered him as much its own as a parrot would a hemp seed in its tray.

Behind the head stretched a fish-like body, with a scaled crest down its monstrous back.

But the horror of the thing was its color. It was dead white—white as chalk, from the tip of its long, beak-like jaws to the tail waving slowly under the dark waters. If Martin had had time to think, he would have found this natural enough; all cave creatures who live their lives shut away from the sun are albino.

Even if he had thought of this, it would not have lessened the horror of the sight. This much he did realize—that the creature was a plesiosaurus, a relic of earth's early ages, strangely preserved in this forgotten ancient land.

Slowly and deliberately the horror swam towards the little pinnacle of rock. There was not the slightest hesitation about its movements, nor any hurry. With a thrill of horror Martin felt that it was accustomed to be fed in this dreadful fashion, and he vaguely wondered how many unfortunates had stood where he was standing, waiting for the inevitable end.

His eyes were fixed on the great staring, expressionless orbs of the lizard, and for the moment he had forgotten the watchers and every thing else. He stood as if frozen to stone while his hideous enemy came steadily towards him.

The creature's beak was within a dozen yards, and still Martin did not move. Though he himself did not know it, he was hypnotized by the stony glare of the plesiosaurus's eyes; fascinated just as a bird is by the snake which glides upon it.

So he would have remained till the monster snatched him from his pinnacle, but for a mere chance. A torch burnt out, and fell hissing into the water.

It was enough. Slight as the sound was, it broke the spell, and Martin wrenched himself into life again. Instinctively his hand flew to his bombs. Quick as light he pulled one out. Having no fulminate, Martin had fitted these bombs with a slow fuse, a very short one, reckoned to burn no more

than four or five seconds. The question flashed through his brain whether he would have time to light it before the brute was upon him.

Urgent as the peril was, his hand did not shake as he pulled out his match and lit the fuse.

It fizzed up, with a small red glow, throwing out a little shower of hissing sparks. Martin raised the bomb above his head in his right hand, and, as he did so, the monster also rose.

Its vast pale head shot up out of the lake with the water streaming off it; its beak-like jaws opened, gaping a yard apart.

In a flash Martin saw his chance and took it. With all his force he flung the little bomb straight in between those double rows of knife-like teeth.

With a clang like the slamming of a steel door the jaws closed. For an instant the brute seemed to hesitate. An instant only, yet to Martin it was an age of agony. If his home-made fuse failed him his last chance of life was gone; there would be no time to prepare the second bomb.

The head was darting forward again. Martin did not move. He knew it was useless, and at any rate he would show Odan and his brutal crew that he knew how to meet death.

Then—then a thud. Not a loud explosion but something more like the sound made by a dynamite cartridge exploding under the stump of a tree.

A puff of dark smoke, and as it rose, the monster, headless, fell back into the lake.

Down crashed that ponderous body, flinging the spray high as Martin’s head. But though the dreadful creature was to all intents and purposes dead, yet the slow lizard life within it caused it to lash the water fearfully.

Its struggles were a fearsome sight. Like a whale in its death flurry it thrashed the water with its fish-like fins and its long tail. The whole of the great underground lake boiled and foamed, and waves beat upon the shore as in a storm. The crashes and splashings sent echoes booming and thundering through all the vast cavern. They beat back from the rock dome high overhead with a deafening, appalling clamor.

Martin watched, fascinated, during the few moments that the dying agonies lasted. Then slowly the monster sank beneath the waves, and went glimmering down into the unknown depths. And Martin felt his knees like

water under him, while the cave and all it contained swam mistily before his eyes.

But the will within him was strong. He knew that now, of all times, he must not show the white feather. With a tremendous effort he pulled himself together and faced Odan and his followers.

Odan and the Norsemen were still on their feet; but as for the brown men, one and all were down on their marrow-bones. Some, indeed, were flat on their faces on the rocks.

As for Odan himself—fury, unbelief, but more than that—fear was written large on his heavy countenance. Never having seen an explosive in his life except a shot from Martin's pistol, having no idea whatever of the properties of gunpowder, this was to him the greatest miracle of all.

A sudden wave of triumph swept through Martin's veins. He made up his mind that now was the time to act. He must not wait for the effect to wear off. At once he stepped into the boat, picked up the paddle, and with a couple of strong strokes sent the little craft across to the bank.

Stepping out, he walked straight up to Odan.

"I claim your promise," he said, looking the giant in the eyes.

Odan's gigantic frame quivered with rage and fear combined. His great right hand moved towards his sword hilt. If Martin then had shown the slightest sign of fear, Odan would have cut him down. But not a muscle of the boy's face quivered, and he faced the leader as calmly as though he himself had a regiment behind him.

Odan uttered a curse under his tawny mustache.

"You have won, wizard!" he said savagely. "I keep my word. You can go."

Martin merely nodded. He glanced scornfully at the mob of terrified Lemurians, then, taking a torch from one of the men, strolled coolly off up the tunnel leading to fresh air and freedom.

Calm as he looked, in reality Martin was far from happy. By this time he knew Odan's savage mind far too well to trust him. He remembered that he was five good miles from even such safety as the temple afforded, and the only way to cover the distance was afoot. Long before he could return to the capital, Odan's men would have recovered from their panic, and with Odan encouraging them would be at his heels.

Once round the first curve in the tunnel, he quickened his pace. A moment or two later he caught sight of the circle of bright light which was

the entrance to the tunnel. He almost ran, and in spite of his danger could have shouted with joy when he found himself outside the fearsome place, and in the full glare of the hot sun.

He looked round. The litter stood where he had left it, and to his astonishment and relief the four brown men who had carried it were still with it. Boldness, Martin felt, was his best policy. He walked straight across to it.

The faces of the bearers were a study. It was quite certain that they had never expected to see him again, either alive or dead. All four dropped on their knees as he came up to them.

Martin smiled inwardly.

"They must take me for a ghost," he said to himself.

"Get up!" he said curtly, and as they did not move he administered a gentle kick to the nearest.

The man sprang instantly to his feet and the others followed his example. Martin stepped into the litter and pointed towards the city.

"Get on with you!" he said sharply.

It was his gesture, not his words, that the men understood. They lifted the litter and started off. Martin glanced back in the direction of the tunnel. But there was no sign of Odan and his crew.

"That's all to the good," said Martin aloud. "But I wish I hadn't quite so far to go."

The bearers went on at a sort of jog-trot, a rate at which they would cover about five miles an hour.

Martin's brain was working double tides. He was perfectly certain that at that moment Odan was haranguing his men, trying to start them in pursuit.

"If I'd only got my plane," he muttered.

He started sharply, for an idea had suddenly flashed into his head.

He looked out. A long way off to his right he could see the upper part of the harbor, the calm water lying like a blue mirror under the sun blaze. He saw something else, and that was a road or track running off the one he was traveling in the direction of the harbor. No doubt it was the one along which the salt was carried for shipment.

He leaned over, and pointed out this track to his men.

"That way!" he said sharply.

Obedient as slaves, the men turned down the side road and jogged sharply onwards. Martin glanced back.

Near the cave mouth men, looking like a swarm of ants in the distance, streamed across the plain.

“I thought as much,” he muttered. “Odan’s on the job.”

XIX. THE SECOND BOMB

During the next few seconds Martin did some pretty hard thinking. The path along which his bearers were carrying him ran through a tract of low, dark-green scrub, and so far he was fairly certain that Odan had not seen him.

But once Odan and his men were out of the valley, they would have a good view of the road running back towards the capital, and would know that Martin had left it.

Then they would most certainly try the branch road, and as they could travel twice as fast as the litter bearers, the game would be up.

Martin looked towards the harbor, which was now little more than a mile away. If he left the litter and ran, he could reach it ahead of his enemies. But even so, he could not be certain of finding a boat, and if he did find one he would have to row two or three miles to reach the place where the *Bat* was moored. Also, he would be in full view from the shore, and could not hope to row as fast as Odan's men could run.

He glanced to the left, and saw the great domed roof of the temple palace rising against the hot blue sky, about three miles away; then in a flash he made up his mind.

"Stop!" he called sharply to his carriers.

They seemed to understand. At any rate they came to a halt, and instantly Martin was out of the litter.

"Go on," he ordered, pointing down the track to the harbor, "straight to the water."

Rather reluctantly they moved on. Martin watched them a moment, then, turning to the left, plunged into the thick of the scrub, and headed straight towards the landmark which the towering bulk of the temple offered.

The heat was frightful; for while the bush cut off what little air there was, it was not high enough to give any shelter from the intolerable blaze of the mid-day sun. Great drops of perspiration streamed down Martin's face and rolled into his eyes, almost blinding him. What he had gone through

already that morning was not the best training for this sort of thing. But he did not flag, but kept on at a steady jog-trot which covered the ground at the rate of five or six miles an hour.

He was thirsty when he started; before he had gone a mile his throat was like sandpaper and his tongue a dry stick. He picked up a pebble and put it into his mouth, but that was no use. In spite of himself his pace began to slacken.

He came at last to a bit of rising ground. The bushes on it grew scantily, but he felt that he must see what Odan was doing. Bending double, he climbed the hillock and looked cautiously out.

What he saw was this. One body of men was coming down the salt track at a sharp double. On the main road, which led to the town, the rest of them were traveling fast in a solid body, and the dust rose in clouds under their trampling feet. In front was a tall figure whose golden helmet gleamed resplendent in the sunlight.

Martin's eyes filled with dismay.

"The fellow's been too cute for me!" he groaned.

Each moment Martin's chances were growing more slim, yet he refused to despair. He drew a long breath, hurried back down the slope, and set to running again.

He had to beat the main body to the boathouse. If he could do that, and get aboard the *Bat* before they caught him, he might still escape. If not —well, he knew Odan a deal too well to suppose that he would get off with his life this time.

His heart pounded against his ribs, and he had an ugly pain in his side, and black specks began to dance before his eyes. But he clenched his teeth and kept on.

Suddenly he was out of the scrub and among fields where Indian corn and sweet potatoes were growing. To the right was the harbor with the boathouse little more than half a mile away. He looked to the left. There was the road, also about half a mile away, and even as he looked the cloud of dust rising high in the hot air told him that Odan's men were there.

It was no use trying to hide any longer. There was nothing for it but to race for the boathouse. He made for it at top speed, but before he had gone twenty steps there came a fierce shouting from behind.

Odan could see him, and the chase was on.

If Martin had been fresh, he would have thought nothing of such a run, especially with such a start as he had. But by now he was fairly reeling, he could hardly breathe, and he had never before been in such agonies of thirst. It was only the sight of what was behind him that kept him going at all—that and the feeling that he must beat Odan at any price.

The first field was yams hilled up like English potatoes; deep, soft soil and dreadful going. He crossed it, plunging through a low hedge, and came right on top of two Lemurians hoeing weeds. They gazed at him an instant with goggling eyes, then both fell flat on their faces.

Martin saw a big earthen jug of water standing under the hedge. He snatched it up, took one deep draught, dropped it and tore away.

A fresh roar behind, and, glancing back, he saw Odan and half a dozen huge Norsemen clearing the hedge at the upper end of the field. They yelled like a pack of hounds on a hot scent, and Martin knew they were shouting to the brown men to hold him. But the men were far too scared, and lay where they had fallen.

The water had given Martin new life, and though he was deadly tired he managed to keep his lead. With his eyes fixed on the boathouse he raced for it.

Suddenly the thought came to him that Odan might have left a guard over the place. Instinctively his hand searched for his one remaining bomb.

He crossed another field, struggled though a fence of prickly pear, and came out into the street.

It was the hour of the midday sleep, and not a soul was in sight on the broad open quay. The boathouse was right in front of him.

He paused for a moment to get his bomb. It was his last. His pursuers saw him stop. Their yell of triumph spurred him on, and he dashed straight for the boathouse.

To his intense relief there was no one there, and the *Bat* lay safely moored at her pontoon.

He was down the steps in two jumps, and, laying his bomb down, set to unfastening the ropes that moored her.

The knots were hard; someone had doubled them all, and his blood chilled as he realized it would take time to untie them.

He felt for his knife, but, like his pistol, it had been taken.

The shouts of Odan’s men grew louder, and, in spite of all his pluck, his fingers shook a little as he wrestled with the hard knots.

One was loose. As he leaped across to reach the other, he heard the hammering of a score of sandalled feet on the quay above.

Rage filled his heart.

"Caught at the finish!" he muttered fiercely. "Well, they shall have the bomb first."

Straightening himself, he picked up the bomb and struck a match.

As the little flame burnt up straight in the windless air Odan appeared at the head of the steps. He was covered with dust and the sweat streamed off him, but his savage eyes glowed with triumph.

"Ha!" he roared in his great bull-like voice. "So you are trapped, O sorcerer. Now let us see if your black arts can save you!"

As he spoke he drew his bronze sword from its scabbard, and the keen blade flashed in the sun blaze.

"Get back!" cried Martin in a ringing voice. "Get back! My arts can save me. One step forward and it will be your last!"

Odan hesitated. He was mad with rage and with longing to finish Martin, whom he regarded as the only real bar between himself and the throne. Yet, as ever, Martin's calm front daunted his savage, superstitious soul.

His men came pounding up behind him. Their presence gave him confidence, and all of a sudden he plunged forward.

Instantly Martin touched the match of the fuse, and, raising his little bomb high above his head, hurled it straight at the giant.

Odan saw it coming. He ducked and dodged, and the bomb missed him by a matter of inches.

But it struck the edge of the quay a couple of yards behind him and exploded with a deafening crash, flinging splinters of metal and stone in every direction.

With a yell of agony the rebel leader pitched forward, and rolled heavily down the steps on to the pontoon, his heavy sword clattering after him. As for his men, appalled by the explosion, they broke and ran. But two lay writhing on the stones of the quay, and others were bleeding from jagged wounds.

Martin did not hesitate an instant. Leaping forward, he snatched up Odan's sword, slashed the remaining rope, and, stepping swiftly into the hull of the flying boat, switched on and pressed the self-starter.

To his intense relief it answered instantly. With a stuttering roar the twin engines burst into life, the propellers spun dizzily, and the *Bat*, as if glad to feel her master's hand after so many days of idleness, shot out across the smooth water, trailing a milky wake behind her.

He sent her rushing onwards faster and faster until the air began to scream past his burning face. Then he pulled back the joy stick, and felt her leave the water and rise lightly into the air.

Up and up she went, the roar of her exhaust bringing the echoes beating back from the land. Then at three hundred feet he circled.

The first thing he saw was Odan himself, apparently little the worse, standing on the edge of the quay, furiously shaking his huge fist at the plane. Behind him were forty or fifty of his men staring up, wonder-struck, at the wheeling *Bat*.

Martin was conscious of a shock like a blow. He had fully believed that the great brute was dead and done for, and it was the cruellest disappointment to see him on his legs, as active for mischief as ever.

He looked beyond—at the temple palace. It lay baking in the sunshine, without a sign of life about it.

Martin suddenly felt that he hated it—that he was sick of the whole place and everything connected with it. On top of that came a second thought.

Why should he stay in it? He had plenty of petrol for the flight back to Lost Island. Why not return to the dear old Professor and the kindly Scipio, and leave all these madmen to fight out their own quarrels?

Hardly knowing what he did he swung the *Bat*'s nose round, and went tearing away towards the sea with the speed of a homing pigeon.

XX. MARTIN PLAYS THE GAME

Martin was up nearly a thousand feet; the cool air beat upon his burning face, and cooled not only his cheeks but his hot and angry soul. And as he began to get back to his usual steady-going self his heart smote him sorely. Every minute he felt more like a soldier who is running away from the enemy.

He turned and looked back. There was the strange island lying grilling under the blaze of the tropic sun; there was the town with its mysterious-looking houses, and above, on its hill, the great temple palace towering against the blue sky.

And on its domed roof stood a figure—a figure looking no bigger than an ant, yet from which the sun struck a flaming yellow ray.

Though the distance was far, far too great for Martin to recognize him, yet he felt instinctively that this was Akon.

Yes; Akon roused by the roar of the plane had climbed to the topmost point of the temple roof, and now was watching his friend flying away across the sea—leaving him and his to the ugly mercies of Odan and his crew.

A hot flush of shame reddened Martin's cheeks, and, like a flash, he turned the plane, wheeling at such an angle that for a moment she side-slipped, and was almost out of control. But he righted her at once, and, opening her throttle to its widest, came roaring back across the harbor, heading straight for that lonely figure standing there on the temple roof.

Three minutes later he was flashing across the ancient city. Now he saw close beside Akon's towering figure the squat powerful form of Hymer, the priest. Both raised their swords in salute as he passed high overhead.

Below, set in the center of the palace grounds, was the lake, a little space of purest blue set in a frame of flowering shrubbery. Martin cut out his engine, and, sliding down through the wide spaces of air, alighted with a slight splash in the center of the sheet.

Before he reached the bank Akon and the priest were there to greet him. The relief on Akon's face filled Martin with fresh remorse.

The prince stepped forward with outstretched hands.

"I told Hymer that they could not hold you," he said triumphantly, "but even I did not dream that you would not only trick Odan, but also recover your flying machine."

Martin stood with bent head and downcast eyes.

"But neither of you believed that, once I was free, I could have deserted you," he answered, in a low, shamed voice.

"Deserted us! How mean you?" asked Akon wonderingly.

"Did you not see?" returned Martin bitterly. "Did you not watch me flying away towards the other island?"

"I—I thought that you were trying the powers of your machine," stammered Akon.

"Nothing of the sort. I was leaving you—deserting you. Don't you understand?" cried Martin fiercely.

The priest stepped forward.

"The more your credit, that you have come back to us," he said, in his deep voice. "Do not blame yourself. From your face I can see that much has befallen you since Odan stole you away. If I mistake not"—his little, shrewd eyes scanned Martin's face keenly—"if I mistake not, you have passed through the ordeal of the cave. Is it not so?"

"The white beast in the underground lake—is that what you meant?" asked Martin. "Yes, that was it."

Akon started back.

"You have faced the monster that never dies?" he gasped, in a tone of utter unbelief.

"He's dead all right now," said Martin grimly.

Akon opened his mouth, but could find no words. He looked at Martin as though he were something above mere man.

"Oh, it's nothing to make a fuss about!" went on Martin pettishly. "I gave him one of our powder pills, and blew his beastly head off. About time, too. From the look of him he'd been living on human sacrifices for a century or two."

Lightly as he spoke, Martin could not help shivering at the recollection of the ghastly ordeal he had gone through.

Hymer saw the shiver; saw, too, that Martin, in spite of all his pluck, was on the point of collapse.

“What you require, my friend, is food and rest,” he said bluntly. “Come with me at once. No; you need not wait to secure your flying machine. We will attend to that.”

So saying, he took Martin by the arm, and led him to his quarters. He made him undress, and while he did so prepared a bath, in which he dissolved certain powders.

The result was magical. Almost as Martin stretched his aching limbs in the cool water the pain and soreness left him, and his strength came back.

When he had bathed, Hymer brought him a drink in a crystal cup. The liquid was violet in color, yet clear and sparkling.

As soon as Martin had drunk it the priest bade him lie down. In three minutes he was sound asleep, and when, some four hours later, he awoke very suddenly, he was hungry as a wolf, and felt as fit as he had ever been in his life.

For a moment he lay quiet, wondering what it was had roused him so sharply. Then came a thud from somewhere overhead, a thud so heavy that the building, massive as it was, seemed to quiver.

Martin leaped to his feet, and began flinging on his clothes. As he did so came another of those tremendous thumps, and immediately afterwards Hymer entered.

“So you are awake?” he said gravely.

“I should think I was. What is happening?”

“Odan is attacking with all his forces,” answered the priest.

“But what is the noise? Surely he has no guns?”

“No, my friend, he has not guns. Those are great stones which he is hurling upon us with his catapults.”

Martin stared at the priest. To him a catapult was a little instrument made of a forked stick and elastic, for shooting rats or small birds. A catapult that could hurl huge boulders on to the tall roof of the palace was something quite new to him.

“Catapults!” he repeated wonderingly. “Can we see?”

Hymer nodded. “Come with me,” he said, and led the way out of the room.

He took Martin to an upper floor and into a bare room, lit, not from above like the other rooms, but with deep narrow slits in the walls.

“Look out!” said the priest grimly.

Martin went to the window, and, as he peered through, Hymer saw him start.

Well he might, for the sight that met his eyes was a startling one. The embrasure faced the harbor, and below the palace the broad quays were black with armed men. There were thousands of them, mostly Lemurians, but all led and officered by Odan's Norsemen.

Directly in front of the palace, at the end of the wide street which led up to it, was a huge wooden erection on wheels. From it rose two tall uprights made of thick, springy bamboo. These were joined at the top by a cross-piece, in the center of which was a sort of cup made of strong canes. From the cross-piece raw hide ropes ran back to a sort of windlass. Men were working the windlass, slowly straining back the bamboos until the cross-piece was almost level with the ground.

When the cross-piece was at last in position, two more men brought forward a boulder, wheeling it on a small four-wheeled truck. So massive was it that it took four men to lift it and place it in position.

"Three hundred pounds if it's an ounce," muttered Martin.

"Stand back!" said Hymer sharply, but Martin was too fascinated to move.

Next moment another man standing by with a mallet struck loose the bolt which held the trigger in position.

There was a sharp twanging sound, followed by a tremendous whizz, and the huge stone, soaring upwards in a great curve, came rushing towards the palace.

Hymer caught Martin by the arm and dragged him back. Then came a crash overhead as loud almost, as if an eighteen pounder shell had hit the roof. The whole room rocked with the force of the impact, and mortar loosened from the walls rattled down in showers. Then followed a terrible rumble as the stone, accompanied by a mass of rubbish, went rolling away down the slope of the dome to fall in thunder to the ground below.

Martin turned to Hymer, and there was a very grave look on his face.

"How long will it take them to smash us up at this rate?" he asked.

"The roof is holed already," replied Hymer bitterly. "Before morning it will be battered in completely. And, alas, we have no engines capable of reaching theirs!"

"But," said Martin, "even if the roof goes, they can't get in that way. We can always retreat to the lower floor."

“You do not understand,” replied Hymer. “Once the roof is opened, they will throw fire balls upon it. Then what can save us?”

“Phew! I hadn’t thought of that,” said Martin. “This is going to be a bit awkward. It seems to me I shall have to take out the *Bat* and try a little of their own medicine upon them. A few of our bombs ought to make a nasty mess in that crowd there.”

“But they know already of the power of your bombs,” objected Hymer. “Will they not scatter and take cover?”

“Quite likely they will,” allowed Martin thoughtfully. “Still, they wouldn’t be able to work that infernal machine of theirs if they were under cover.”

“True, but you cannot fly above them always. As you have told me, of the spirit which your machine drinks there is but little left, and we have no more to give you.”

Martin nodded. Hymer had hit the weak spot at once. There was no getting out of the fact that Martin had not petrol left for this sort of thing. And it was absolutely necessary to keep enough in his tanks to fly back to Lost Island when the time came.

Another monstrous stone crashed on the roof of the palace. It was followed by a terrific clatter of falling masonry.

Martin’s lips tightened.

“That went through,” he said. “Priest, it’s up to us to do something, and it seems to me that the *Bat* is the only weapon by which we can reach them. Let me try a bomb or two. It may scare them.”

“That is true, my friend. The fire balls will of a certainty terrify them. Yes, I tell you, that so long as Odan lives he has the power to bring them back to battle.”

“Then the ugly beggar has got to die!” exclaimed Martin. It was only the sight of Hymer’s puzzled face which made Martin realize that he had spoken in English.

“Then Odan must die,” he explained in Norse. “I would give my own life could I but be sure of his death,” replied Hymer, and there was a glitter in his eyes which told Martin that he meant what he said. “But Odan, more than the rest, knows now the power of your fire bombs. How can you be certain of throwing one upon him?”

“I can’t,” admitted Martin.

There was silence for some moments, broken only by the harsh creaking of the windlass as Odan's men toiled to draw back again the great lever of the catapult.

Suddenly Martin brought his right fist down with a smack into the palm of the other hand. "I have it, Hymer," he cried. "Upon my word, I do believe I have it. Listen now!"

Quickly he explained his scheme, and the priest's eyes glowed as he listened.

XXI. A FORCED LANDING

Martin felt as fresh as paint as he hurried down to where the *Bat* lay under a rough housing at the edge of the palace lake. Short as his sleep had been, the bath and, above all, the draught which Hymer had given him, had taken all the ache out of his body. His nerves were steady, and his eyes clear.

With him went the priest and two men who were loaded with bombs. All the time that Martin had been away Hymer had kept his workmen hard at it, and now there was a big store of bombs and of powder in the temple.

Though nearly sunset, the heat was greater than ever. There was not a breath of air moving, and sullen-looking thunder-clouds were banking up in every direction.

It was no sort of weather for flying, and Martin knew it. But the monstrous boulders from Odan's vast catapult still thundered on the roof of the palace, and gaping holes yawned in the golden casing of the great dome. Whatever was to be done to stop the bombardment had to be done quickly, or they would soon have the whole place about their ears.

There was another danger, too—one which frightened Martin more than the bombardment of the palace. At any minute one of these great stones might pitch on the *Bat* and smash her into kindling wood. The quicker she was off, the better from every point of view.

They reached the lake; Martin got aboard, and the men began stacking the bombs in the cockpit. Some of them gleamed a rich, reddish yellow in the evening light.

"What on earth are these made of?" asked Martin, as he picked one up to put it in its place.

"Gold," answered the priest. "There was no more bronze."

Martin fairly gasped. The priest looked worried.

"Will they not do as well?" he asked anxiously.

"Every bit as well," Martin answered him. "Only it seems too funny. Gold in my country is the rarest metal. You can buy a ton of bronze for a few ounces of gold."

“You shall have all the gold you like to ask for if we come out of this safely,” replied Hymer.

“And if you can do what you say you can, we may yet beat off these rebels.”

“Don’t worry,” said Martin. “I think my plan will work. All I am afraid of is that the storm may break too soon.”

“I, too, fear the storm,” said Hymer. “Hasten.”

Martin set his bombs in order. He took the smouldering slow match which the priest handed him, and placed it where it could be reached easily. Suddenly he turned to Hymer.

“Priest,” he said, “will you come too? It would be a tremendous help if you would throw the bombs,” explained Martin.

“If there’s a storm I shall want both hands for the controls.”

The priest’s deep-set eyes glowed.

“I thank you, my friend,” he said. “There is nothing which would please me more greatly.”

Stepping lightly as a boy, he followed Martin into the body of the *Bat* and took the observer’s seat.

Next moment the great engines roared, and the plane tore forward across the lake.

There was no room to spare, and it took Martin all his time to rise before he reached the far bank. But he did it safely, and a few moments later was circling high above the roof of the palace.

The appearance of the plane caused a sensation among the rebels. Many bolted for cover, but other, bolder, shot arrows at her in showers. Of course these failed to reach her, but all of a sudden the huge catapult twanged, and a stone as big as a twelve-inch shell came whizzing up. It was so well aimed that Martin actually felt the wind of it as it hurtled past.

“Close!” he said sharply, and turned to Hymer.

“I’m going for them,” he shouted. “When I’m over that engine of theirs drop a bomb.”

Hymer nodded to show he understood. His keen old face was glowing with excitement. So far from being frightened, he was actually enjoying his rush through the air.

Knowing how difficult it is to drop a bomb from a plane on a target, Martin had no notion that Hymer would get near the catapult. He swooped

within a hundred feet of the ground, and exactly as he got to his lowest point the priest flung two bombs at once overboard.

Suddenly he gave a great shout. Martin, banking and circling, could hardly believe his eyes when he saw the catapult in ruins and the ground strewn with dead rebels.

"Splendid!" he cried in delight. "That's cooked their goose."

Hymer smiled grimly.

"That has stopped Odan's stone-throwing for a time," he said in Martin's ear. "But, remember, it is only for a time. He will soon have a fresh catapult at work. Let us not waste more time upon his followers, but strike at once at the spot of which you spoke."

Martin nodded, and wheeling again shot away across the town.

The storm was rising fast, and the look of the sky reminded Martin of that black evening when he had first reached the island of the Lemurians. Monstrous masses of sooty vapor rose like ranges of mountains on every side, and, even at the height at which they flew, the air was hot, sullen, and lifeless.

Speeding across the town they came to the suburbs where the great houses of the nobles stood, each in its own grounds.

Like all the Lemurian houses, these were built of the same dark red, heavy stone. But the one to which Hymer pointed was larger, more massive, and more gloomy-looking than the rest.

Martin put his lips close to the priest's ear.

"You are sure there are no women or children?" he asked.

"I am sure," replied Hymer quietly. "Odan hates women, and has none but men about him. Even his wife is not allowed in this fortress."

As he spoke he picked up one of the largest bombs, and next instant they were over the house and Martin sent the *Bat* swinging down close above the roof. Hymer had already touched off the fuse of the bomb. Now he flung it down.

It missed the house, but only by a yard or two, and the bomb exploded in the garden, flinging up a great spurt of earth and smoke. Martin turned instantly, and came back along the same line. This time Hymer made no mistake. His bomb dropped plumb in the center of the roof, and when the smoke cleared there was a hole big enough to drop a piano through.

Half a dozen men came bolting out of the house, and vanished like rabbits into the shrubbery. Martin paid no attention to them, but banked

back across the house. This third time Hymer's bomb went wide, but he was not discouraged. The fourth hit the house, the fifth and sixth did no harm, but the seventh seemed to disappear through the very hole the first had made.

"That's done it!" shouted Martin triumphantly. "That's done it!"

"It has!" answered the priest grimly, as red flames came roaring through the gap. "Now to see if the sight of his burning house will draw the rebel."

Martin circled higher.

"It has!" he cried, a moment later. "Here he comes, and his men with him."

Sure enough, Odan had left his post on the wharf, and he and a large number of his men were running at full speed towards the blazing house. The Lemurian nobles set great store by their palaces, and Odan's one idea was to save his mansion from destruction.

"Now for it," said Martin grimly. "We have them in the open. With any luck we can finish them."

Hymer's deep-set eyes glowed with a strange fire.

"If we can kill Odan himself," he said, "the rebellion is at an end. But swing away, my friend. Fly away so that he may not see the trap we have prepared for him."

Martin rose higher, and flew inland. He was thinking of nothing but Odan. He knew now that the only way to end the rebellion was to finish off its leader. Once Odan was killed, the whole thing would collapse, and all this horrible fighting and slaying of Odan's unfortunate followers would be at an end. So set was his mind on this that for the moment he had quite forgotten the storm. Suddenly the dark sky was lit by a blaze of vivid lightning, and on its heels came a dull, heavy rumble, like loaded carts crossing a hollow bridge. Then a gust of cold, wet wind caught the plane, making her dip and stagger with its force.

Instantly Martin wheeled and faced it.

Heavy as the gust was, it was nothing to what followed. In a moment a furious gale was howling through the upper air.

"We must get back!" cried Martin in Hymer's ear. "We can never face this."

He opened his throttle to the widest, and headed the *Bat* back towards the Palace lake. It was too late. With a thrill of horror Martin realized that

not all the force of the plane's great engines could drive her into the teeth of this raging storm.

Spinning like a leaf in the screaming air eddies, the *Bat* was forced backwards by the fury of the gale, and it was only a matter of seconds before Martin saw that his one chance of saving the lives of himself and Hymer was to make a landing as quickly as possible.

Almost immediately beneath was the open space of Odan's garden, which was protected on the windward side by a belt of thick trees. If he could reach the ground behind these, he might still save the plane from utter destruction.

From damage, no. That was impossible. the *Bat*, you will remember, was a seaplane, and had floats, not wheels, beneath her under carriage. Being fitted to alight only on water, Martin could not hope to bring her down on land without serious damage.

Down she went. So fierce was the wind that, although she was descending at a steep angle, Martin had to keep her engines going.

Nearer the ground the gale was not quite so violent as it had been higher up, and Martin was able to cut out. The big machine struck the turf with a heavy shock, and there was a crash which made Martin's heart sink. The under carriage must surely be reduced to splinters.

But there was no time to think of that. He and Hymer were unhurt, and now the one thing to do was to make the plane fast before the wind could blow her over and wreck her completely.

Luckily he had plenty of rope in the cockpit; luckily, too, the priest's muscles were equal to those of any two ordinary men. At the end of five minutes the *Bat* was lashed down so firmly that nothing short of a tornado could have wrenched her from her moorings.

Meantime, the clouds had thickened until it was almost as dark as night, but a darkness riven by flashes of intensely vivid lightning. Overhead the wind shrieked like a thousand demons, while the thunder crashed in deafening peals.

So far not a drop of rain had fallen, but Martin knew it must come very soon. Hymer caught him by the arm and said something, but the din of wind and thunder together was so terrific that Martin could not hear a word.

All the same, he understood. The priest was pointing towards Odan's house, which was blazing to the skies. Vast sheets of flame seized by the wind were carried away like torches. The glare lit the whole garden like

day. All around the house men were working frantically, rushing up buckets of water from a pool in the garden. At their head was the monstrous figure of Odan himself, the crimson glow glaring on his golden armor.

It was too late. At that moment Odan, turning, caught sight of the plane. The roar that came from his deep throat rose even above the hideous racket of the storm, and, drawing his sword, he came rushing across the turf.

XXII. A BATTLE OF GIANTS

Martin had no weapon of any sort with which to meet the rush of the mad giant, so leaped towards the plane to get a bomb. In a flash he had one but to his horror and despair he found that the slow match had burned out. Though he had matches about him it was useless to dream of lighting one in this furious gale.

There was a clatter of metal on metal. He spun round, to see Odan and the priest fighting furiously. The priest had drawn his bronze sword, and was defending himself against the terrific onslaught of the rebel chief.

At first sight the combat was terribly one-sided. Odan towered a foot and more above the short, squat figure of Hymer. His reach was double that of the priest, and his sword half as long again. On the face of it the priest was utterly outmatched.

Martin rushed desperately forward. He was prepared to fling himself into the fray, bare handed, rather than see his friend murdered before his eyes.

“Stand back!” cried Hymer, in his great, deep, rolling voice. “Stand back. Think you that I cannot deal with this son of evil?”

Martin paused, and suddenly realized that the combat was not so one-sided as he had at first supposed. If Odan had the height and reach, the priest had the strength of a bull, marvelous skill and complete confidence. While Odan fought like a mad beast, Hymer was cool and complete master of himself.

In the red glare of the blazing house the bronze swords flashed and wheeled like flames. Overhead the thunder bellowed like the crack of doom, and the gale shrieking across the island formed a fit accompaniment to this battle of giants.

Odan’s followers were thick on the turf behind him. But they did not offer to interfere. They stood as still as Martin himself, watching the tremendous duel with fascinated eyes.

Odan’s sword rose and fell like a hammer as he strove with all his might to beat down his adversary’s guard. But the priest’s wrist was

wrought steel, and his skill of fence something to marvel at. With his short, stiff sword he wove around himself a ring of defense which even Odan's mighty muscles could not penetrate.

Odan's face was a terrible sight. The man had gone berserk—fighting mad. His pale eyes glared horribly, there was foam upon his lips. He looked like nothing human.

Suddenly he sprang back. Raising his sword above his head he brought it down with a force that would have cloven a horse in twain. Hymer warded the blow, yet its weight brought him to his knees. With a wild roar of triumph Odan swung up his sword once more to give the finishing blow.

What happened next was so swift that Martin's eyes could hardly follow it. In a flash Hymer was on his feet again, and, instead of springing away, or dodging aside from Odan's next fearful hammer stroke, he leaped in after him. Odan's flaming blade came whizzing downwards and sparks flew as it clashed on Hymer's helmet, felling the priest to the ground. But at the self-same instant the giant too staggered back with a choking grunt, to drop full length upon the grass with a thud like that of a falling tree. For an instant there was silence. Even the fury of the storm seemed quelled for an instant. The only sound was the crackle of the flames devouring Odan's palace.

Odan tried to rise, but the blood was streaming from him, and Martin saw that Hymer's sword had passed clean through his body just below his corselet. Then, with a hoarse cry, he fell back, dead.

And then the heavens opened, and down came the rain, not in drops, but in solid sheets.

For the time Martin stood quite still. He was like a man under a shower-bath, gasping for breath. Everywhere around him was a gray sheet of falling water. He could not see a yard.

But the cold douche quickly pulled him together. A flash of lightning shone livid through the gloom, and showed Hymer lying where he had fallen, flat on his back on the streaming ground.

Martin sprang towards him, seized him, and with a great effort of strength pulled him back under the nearest tree. He hardly knew why he did so, for he fully believed the splendid old priest to be dead. No human skull could have stood the crushing force of Odan's last terrific blow.

Though Odan was dead, though his men had vanished, though the rebellion would now, no doubt, rapidly come to an end, yet Martin was sick at heart. During these days of stress and trial he had come to love the brave, resourceful priest, and to feel that in him he had a real friend.

Not since the news of his father's death had he felt so miserable.

The lightning flashed again, and in its blue glare Martin saw that Hymer's eyes were open!

He caught his breath, and with trembling fingers began to loosen the clasps that held the helmet.

He heard a deep sigh.

"Hymer!" he cried. "You are not dead?"

"Dead?" repeated the priest; and Martin fairly gasped as Hymer raised himself to a sitting position. "Think you that Odan could kill me?" he asked scornfully.

"I—I did think so," stammered Martin. "I can't tell you how glad I am to find that he has not."

The priest stretched out his great hand, found Martin's, and gave it a crushing grip.

"I would that I had a son like you," he said.

Then, as if ashamed of showing even a trace of his real feelings, he rose to his feet.

"Where is Odan?" he demanded.

"Dead," replied Martin. "His body lies where it fell."

Hymer laughed. It was the first time that Martin had ever heard him laugh out loud, and the sound positively startled him.

"Then we have done that which we set out to do," said the priest. "The King is safe, and my life's work is not wasted."

He stepped forward, and as the lightning flashed again found Odan's body and stood over it.

"So this is the end of all your scheming," he said as he bent over the dead man. "Bitter it must be to fall by the hand of the man you most despised. Yet the souls of the dead cry for vengeance, and the punishment is just."

He turned back to Martin.

"The storm is passing," he said. "We must return to the palace and fetch help. Odan's body must be shown to his followers, and for that reason a bier must he brought to carry it into the city."

“But what about the plane?” asked Martin.

“Trouble not. None will dare lay hands upon it. Let us go quickly.”

Martin had learnt to trust Hymer, and the two started away together. The rain still fell heavily, but the wind had dropped, and the storm was passing quickly.

The priest knew every inch of the ground, and, dark as it was, led Martin by a short cut to a gate at the back of the palace gardens. Here he knocked in a peculiar fashion, and at once one of their own guards opened the heavy doors.

The man’s face glowed with delight as he saluted Hymer in the Lemurian fashion.

“We feared for you, my lord,” he said respectfully.

“Fear not,” answer Hymer gravely. “Odan is dead.”

The man gave a shout of joy, and, falling at Hymer’s feet, embraced his knees.

Hymer raised him. “Lock the gate, Valkar,” he said; “then go and inform your companions. And be ready as speedily as possible with a litter and twenty guards. We go to fetch the body of our enemy.”

The man darted away. Hymer and Martin went on into the palace.

At the gate they met Akon, his fine face white and drawn with anxiety. His relief at seeing them was touching, for, like the guard, he had not believed they could have survived the tempest.

But when they told him that Odan was dead, he shouted with gladness and rushed away to tell the king.

Like magic the news was all over the palace, and such a din of cheering rose that Martin, who had looked on the people of the island as a grave and solemn race, could hardly believe his ears.

Akon himself went out in charge of the party who were to bring home the body, and in about an hour the corpse of the rebel leader lay in state in the temple.

But by this time Martin, who was almost dead from fatigue, was sound asleep in his bed.

XXIII. THE WAVE

Martin, working over the *Bat* in the big boathouse on the quay, straightened himself, stretched his arms, and looked round over the quiet town and the harbor basking in the hot sunshine.

He turned to the priest who was standing by, translating Martin's orders to the workmen. "I could not have believed it," he said, in a tone of wonder. "Even though you had told me beforehand, I could never have believed that the rebellion would fizzle out like this."

Hymer smiled in his grave way.

"They have no one to take the place of Odan," he explained. "If Odan had had a son then all might have been different. Odan, you must understand, had a certain claim to the throne by kinship with the king. Without such kinship none would dare to set himself up. As it is, the malcontents are only too anxious to make amends lest they be deprived of their lands and wealth."

"And what are you doing about that?" asked Martin.

"We are requiring them to repair the damage which they have done, and to pay money to the widows of those killed in the fighting. That is all."

Martin nodded. "The very best thing you could do. Those who have any sense will be grateful to be let off so lightly. Hymer, you ought to be Prime Minister of one of the big countries in Europe."

Hymer smiled again. "I am content," he said. "If I have helped to save my own people, I can die in peace."

He looked at Martin very kindly.

"And you, my son, think you that we can repair this flying machine so that she will again rise?"

"I'm sure we can," declared Martin. "Why, the work is almost finished! These men are as skilful mechanics as any in America. They need only to be told, and the work is done."

"And when it is done you will fly away and leave us, is it not so?" asked Hymer sadly.

“I must, of course, return to the other island,” said Martin, “and I must go to America to pay the debts left by my father. But I shall come back. Be sure of that. I should never dream—”

A sharp cry from one of the workmen interrupted him. Martin turned quickly, and saw the man pointing out to sea.

A great wave as high as a wall was coursing majestically in from the open sea. Even as Martin watched, it reached the land, and broke inwards upon the beach with a sullen, thunderous roar. At the harbor mouth it did not break, but came sweeping up the entrance like the tidal wave in the Bay of Fundy.

“A tidal wave!” cried Martin sharply. “Hymer, tell them to shut the outer gates of the boathouse. Quickly! If we get that wave in here it will play the mischief with the *Bat*.”

But the priest’s keen old eyes had already seen what was happening, and before Martin had finished speaking he was snapping out orders to the men.

Half a dozen leapt to close the great double doors of the boathouse. Others wedged them with heavy balks of timber.

Fortunately the plane herself was not in the water. It was her under carriage that had been damaged, and, in order to get at her, she had been raised upon a sort of platform above the floating stage.

For the next minute or two everyone in the boathouse worked with a breathless fury of haste.

Then all that could be done had been done, and there was nothing left but to watch the glassy swell coursing swiftly up the harbor from the sea.

As Martin looked out through an opening under the roof, he saw that it was very close. Next moment, with a low soughing roar, it was upon them. The boathouse rocked and creaked under the great weight of water heaped against it. The floats rose with a loud clatter. Martin, looking down from his perch high in the scaffolding under the roof, saw the whole interior of the place filled with seething foam, and held his breath in agony, expecting to see the *Bat* swamped, torn down, and wrecked.

But the water fell as quickly as it had risen, and dropped, bubbling and muddy, to its former level, while the wave went roaring swiftly away up into the small creeks which ran far inland.

“Close call!” panted Martin, as he dropped back on to the soaking, swinging stage. “But, thanks be, the *Bat*’s all right. Priest, do you often get

these tidal waves?”

Hymer looked much disturbed.

“Never have I known one such as this,” he answered, “though from old men I have heard of them in past times. Great, I fear, must be the harm wrought along the coast. But why,” he added—“why call it a tidal wave? No tide has power to raise itself suddenly to so great a height.”

“You are right,” replied Martin. “It is merely a name which we give to such waves. In reality it is doubtless an earthquake wave caused by some opening or commotion under the bed of the sea.” “Of a truth, that is the more likely cause,” said Hymer. “Where, think you, did this earthquake take place?”

Martin’s face had gone suddenly pale. Instead of answering, he flung open the door on the landward side of the boathouse and rushed up the flight of steps leading to the quay. Hymer, watching him with wonder, saw him stand there straining his eyes across the sea towards the distant white sugar-loaf which was the snow-clad peak surmounting Lost Island.

Suddenly a suspicion of the reason for Martin’s anxiety came into his mind, and he followed him quickly.

“Look!” panted Martin, as the priest joined him. “Look! It is as I feared. The eruption has begun.”

XXIV. A DESPERATE VENTURE

Hymer looked. Behind and beyond the great cone of the volcano a dark cloud was slowly spreading. Though the other island was so far away that even the lofty mountain appeared no larger than a toy, the cloud was rising fast enough for Martin and Hymer to watch its growth. It was spouting upwards like the smoke from the explosion of a submarine mine.

"You mean that the water has reached the molten rock in the pit of which you have told me?" said Hymer.

"I am terribly afraid so," Martin answered. "Hymer, Professor Distin assured me that if this happened the sea would turn to steam and blow the whole island to atoms. And there is the poor Professor left helpless with Scipio and that remaining Norseman—left to perish without even a boat to take them away."

Martin paused a moment, then his face hardened.

"There is but one thing to do," he added. "As soon as ever the *Bat*'s floats can be fixed, I must fly back and give what help I can."

Hymer caught him by the arm.

"You are mad, boy," he said in a tone which Martin had never before heard from him. "You are mad to suggest such a thing. When mountains burn the air is rent so that no bird even could fly through the whirlwinds that rise in fury to the skies. Be advised by me," he implored. "Do not go. We will send one of our fastest ships, manned by our strongest rowers. You and I will go with the ship."

Martin shook his head.

"The ship will take many hours; I shall take but one," he answered. "Believe me, Hymer, it is the only chance to save my friends. Do not try to stop me."

The priest gazed at Martin in silence for several seconds. He saw the dogged set of Martin's jaw, and realized that nothing he could say would be of any avail. He sighed heavily, then turned to the men, and ordered them to get on with the repairs at the top of their speed. Martin himself snatched up his tools, and flung himself into the work with savage energy.

The news that Martin was leaving the island had spread far and wide, and that evening, when at last the *Bat* was ready, and lying upon the water alongside the great floats, a huge crowd had congregated on the broad quay.

It was a strange scene. Night had fallen, a night still, oppressively hot, and darker than Martin had ever known—a night, indeed, on which it would have been impossible to fly without landmarks of some sort. But the mark in this case was only too clear and plain. Out across the sea in the direction of Lost Island a lurid glow rose against the blackness like a pillar of molten metal. Every now and then this pillar seemed to heave and throb, and some minutes after each of these upheavals a dull thud would come to the ears of the watchers, a sound like that of some monstrous gun fired a few miles out to sea. Terrible things were happening out there, and Martin was sick with anxiety for the fate of the Professor and the kindly Scipio.

And now there was a stir in the throng of silent watchers and a gasp of amazement. All eyes were turned towards a row of torches which approached from the direction of the palace and upon the great gold-encrusted litter which a score of tall Norsemen bore down towards the quay.

Martin, sitting in the boathouse, hastily eating food which servants had brought from the palace, heard the stir and looked up.

"It is the king," said Hymer, who sat with him—"the king who comes to say adieu and to see you start upon this journey of yours."

Martin jumped up.

"It is more than kind of him," he said.

"It is a great honor, my son—such an honor as never yet, within my remembrance, has been paid to any save of the royal race."

Martin ran quickly up the broad steps to the wharf, and was in time to see the king descend from the litter. Akon was with him, and the king, still rather pale from his long illness, took the arm of his giant son and stepped forward.

He was a royal figure. The glare of the torches shed a ruddy light upon his snowy hair, his white tunic edged with purple, and the gold of his headdress and breastplate.

The crowds had made way, but all around was a sea of faces, white and brown. The people were very quiet; indeed, hardly a whisper was to be heard among them.

The king released Akon's arm and gave Martin both his hands.

“Englishman,” he said gravely, “I have come to wish you Godspeed upon your perilous journey. I would that you could have been content to take the ship which Hymer offered you, yet I will not attempt to dissuade you from flying to the help of your friends. But this I beg of you to remember—that in this country, for which you have done so much, you and any dear to you will always find a home.”

Martin dropped upon one knee, and kissed the hand of the old man.

“King,” he answered, “in the name of my friends and of myself, I thank you. If I come through safely, I shall, I trust, be back within a few hours with my friends. If not, I shall have died with them. In any case, believe me that I am most grateful for all the kindness I have received at your hands, at those of Prince Akon, and of the chief priest Hymer.”

Akon stepped forward.

“The gold, Martin! Have you forgotten the gold which you needed? It is all ready for you.”

Martin laughed a little.

“My dear Akon,” he answered, “the gold will have to wait. I must not carry a pound extra. Indeed, I do not know whether it will be possible to carry both my friends here in the *Bat*. It is for that reason that Hymer has already despatched a galley to pick me up in case I cannot get back with such a weight aboard.”

Akon nodded gravely.

“I understand,” he said. “The gold shall be kept to await your return. But there is one small matter which I will ask you to take.”

As he spoke he pressed a small bag of soft leather into Martin’s hand.

“They are luck stones,” he said—“luck stones from the sea. They belonged to my mother, and she believed that they brought health and happiness. Take them, I beg of you, my friend, and may they bring you through this peril safely!”

Martin was deeply touched.

“Thank you a thousand times, Akon,” he said warmly. “I will take them gladly. And now, good-by; and if you do not see me again, be sure that I shall not forget you as long as I live.” Akon squeezed Martin’s hand in his giant grip. Martin bowed once more to the king, then, turning, hurried down to his waiting plane, and stepped into the cockpit.

Hymer stood by him.

“Good-by, my son,” he said, and his deep, rumbling voice was not quite steady. Martin could hardly believe his own eyes when he saw those of the stern old priest were wet with tears.

“Good-by, and may your God and mine preserve you,” he ended.

One last handshake, then Martin put over the switch of the self-starter. The engine broke into roaring life, sending echoes clattering through the night, and the *Bat* glided out on to the broad, smooth bosom of the harbor.

It was at this instant that the crowd, roused suddenly from their silence, burst out into a tremendous shout—a roar so tremendous that it drowned the deafening exhaust from the *Bat*’s great engines.

And, with this royal farewell ringing in his ears, Martin rose from the water, and, rushing upwards into the black starless night started out upon such an errand as never yet even flying man had attempted.

XXV. A NIGHT OF TERROR

The sound of the shouting died away, and Martin was alone, winging his way at full speed through the hot blackness of the night, guided only by the lurid glow which pulsed against the distant horizon.

There was not a breath of wind. Even at the height at which he flew, which was about two thousand feet, the atmosphere was as deadly stagnant and hot as at sea level.

Yet the air was not still. Every now and then the great plane would seem to check and stagger slightly like a ship whose keel touches the top of a sandbank. Martin did not need to be told that these air bumps were the result of the regularly recurring explosions from the great crater on Lost Island.

He knew the farther he went and the nearer he approached the scene of the eruption, the worse these shocks would affect him.

Yet he hardly gave a thought to the dangers that confronted him; it was the peril of his friend, the Professor, that filled his mind to the exclusion of everything else.

He thought of him sitting helpless in the cave rooms, the solid rock quivering under the throb of the subterranean fires, waiting for the help that might never come.

Fast as he flew, the pace was not fast enough for Martin.

His eyes were fixed on the glow on the skyline, and every minute it widened and deepened.

And, just as he had expected, the force of the explosions grew more and more heavy, until, as each air wave struck her, the *Bat* seemed to pitch like a ship in a heavy storm.

At the end of half an hour he was near enough to see the actual explosions—the columns of molten matter shooting up like a fountain of fire through the dull-red smoke clouds, which hung like a pall over the lower part of the island.

The twin peaks were above the worst of this smoke. Their eternal snows still gleamed rosy red in the glare of the lower fires.

Martin took some courage from the sight. At any rate, the great explosion anticipated by the Professor had not yet come.

There was still hope that the cave itself was safe. The lake lying between it and the crater itself must be some safeguard.

Far below Martin caught a glimpse of a small light in the gloom. This must be the galley sent out by Hymer. He wondered if it would ever reach Lost Island, yet the mere fact that it was trying to do so made him feel less lonely.

On he drove, but the pitching and lurching grew worse and worse; and now the loud thuds of the constant explosions became audible even above the rattling roar of his engines, and the air was so terribly disturbed that at times the big plane became almost unmanageable.

The volcanic cloud was rising, and in it and through it played lightnings, gold, green and violet—beautiful yet terrible fireworks. The heavy air was tainted with sulphur smoke, which caught Martin's throat and made him choke.

Though he could feel no wind, some current was drifting the smoke down in his direction, and he turned northwards with the idea of circling around the worst of it, and coming in from the eastward side.

Sure enough, he soon cleared the smoke; and as soon as he had done so, the island itself opened before him. The sight was at once splendid and terrible. The crater which the Professor had showed him was in full blast, and lava was streaming in a vast river of fire through the rift into the deep tarn. Where the molten rock reached the water the lake was a seething cauldron of steam.

The intense glow flung up from the crater itself and from the great sheet of white-hot lava threw a lurid glare on the tall cliffs surrounding the tarn, and showed up everything as clear as day.

As Martin came nearer he could see that the cliffs on the cave side of the lake were still untouched, and he felt somewhat comforted. There was hope that the Professor and Scipio might still be unharmed.

But the explosions seemed to be more frequent and more furious than ever, and as he came near to the sea entrance to the loch, each air wave hit the plane with a force that sent her fluttering like a dead leaf.

To alight on that boiling lake within less than two miles of the raging crater itself seemed sheer suicide, yet Martin stuck to it. He had not come thus far to turn back.

He was within half a mile of the inlet when there came a shock more violent than any yet. Martin suddenly found the *Bat* dropping helplessly towards the sea. It was as though the air column beneath him had failed altogether.

He did the only thing he could, and tried to hold her in a volplane, or sliding descent. But she was barely fifty feet above the sea before he succeeded in pulling her up, and even then he could not get her nose up again. In another moment she had taken the water with a terrific splash.

For a moment Martin believed that the *Bat* was wrecked. But the Lemurians were good craftsmen, and the stout pontoons which they had built in beneath her stood the shock. She floated safely.

Martin switched on his engine, and found that it was working. But he did not dare to rise again. Instead he taxied in across the calm sea, and was presently between the tall cliffs which bounded the narrow passage leading into the lake.

The noise was deafening. Each separate explosion was enough to split his ear drums. The water, almost boiling hot, was covered with a thick scum of ashes and pumice, among which floated the dead bodies of countless fish and other denizens of the deep sea-lake.

Swirling through this horrible mixture, the *Bat* ran swiftly out of the channel into the lake itself, and as she did so a wave of heat struck Martin's face like the blast from a furnace. He swung to the right, and drove as hard as he could go for the harbor.

All over the lake itself steam clouds hung like vapor from a boiling pot. Martin could hardly see where he was going. The din, too, was so great that it confused him, while the explosions were absolutely stunning in their fury.

The black wall of the cliff loomed up overhead through the smother, and more by luck than skill Martin found that he was at the entrance of the harbor.

He breathed a sigh of thankfulness as he passed into it, and the rock arch shut out something of the appalling clamor.

The gates were wide open, and the next moment he was tying up alongside the well-remembered rock wharf. He sprang ashore. The launch was still there, but there was no sign of the Professor, and the first thing that met his eyes was a huge mass of rock which had crashed down from the roof above, and, falling in the center of the flight of stairs, had broken away

the steps and covered everything with rubble and dust. It was plain that there had been a heavy earthquake already, and Martin knew that another might come at any moment.

Scrambling past the mass of broken rock, he reached the Hall of Pillars, and ran through it, shouting for the Professor.

Even here he could still feel the thud of the explosions, while the solid rock trembled constantly, and every few moments small pieces of rock fell from the vaulted roof.

He reached the great living-room. It was much as he remembered it, with the Professor's books scattered on the table. But the great glass windows were cracked and starred, and dust was over everything.

"Professor!" he shouted again at the top of his voice. Then the curtains of the doorway were pushed aside, and there was Professor Distin standing in the opening.

He stood quite still, staring at Martin as though he saw a ghost, and Martin was grieved to see how thin and frail he looked.

Martin sprang forward. "It's all right, Professor," he cried. "But I was scared stiff. I couldn't find you. I thought you were dead."

The Professor seized Martin's hand and wrung it hard.

"My dear lad," he said, "I can't tell you how glad I am to see you. I had given you up for lost."

For the moment the two were so delighted at meeting again that they forgot the deadly peril in which they stood.

"But how did you get here?" went on the Professor. "Surely not in the *Bat*?"

"Indeed, I did. She is in the cave harbor this minute. She had been damaged, but I rushed over as soon as she was mended to get you out of this as quick as ever I could. I'd half expected you would have started in the launch when this first began."

"So we should, Martin, but we were unable to do so. The eruption began with an earthquake, and a great piece of rock fell from the roof upon the Norseman Thur, the prisoner you left behind. He was dreadfully injured, and, even if Scipio and I could have carried him, was not fit to be moved. But we could not carry him, so had to remain with the poor fellow."

Martin gave a low whistle of dismay. "That's serious," he said. "But see here, Professor, we simply dare not stay another minute. The explosions

are getting worse all the time. Suppose the whole sea-bed caves in, as you said it might? That will be the end of the island and of all of us."

"That is what I fear," replied the Professor gravely. "Yet I know you will agree with me that we cannot leave the unfortunate man to lie here alone in his agony." Martin was wondering what on earth he could say next when the curtain was flung aside, and in rushed Scipio.

At sight of Martin he pulled up short and stood, glaring. His mouth was wide open, and his eyes goggling. Martin laughed.

"It's all right, Scipio," he said. "Don't be scared. It's myself and nobody else."

"Den I don't care if dis old island blows up de next minute!" shouted Scipio in delight.

The Professor cut him short. "Why have you left Thur, Scipio?" he asked sharply.

Scipio started. "Bress my soul! I done clean forgot. De poor chap am dead, boss."

"Dead?" cried the Professor; and ran out of the room.

He was back in less than a minute.

"You are right," he said sorrowfully. "Perhaps it is as well. He could never have recovered. Then, Martin, we had better pack up and leave with all speed."

"Pack up?" exclaimed Martin. "Good Heavens, sir, we can't wait to pack. Scipio, is there food in the launch?"

"Yes, Marse Martin, plenty of grub and a barrel of water."

"Then come on," cried Martin; and, seizing the Professor by the arm, dragged him away through the pillared hall.

As they reached the top of the steps there came a shock as though a magazine of dynamite had exploded outside. All three were thrown down heavily.

Before they could gain their feet again there was a tremendous rushing sound, and a wave as high as the roof itself came thundering into the tunnel.

Rushing forward it flung itself with fearful force against the stone stairs, sending hot spray flying to their summit. Then it sank back, gurgling and seething.

"The *Bat*!" gasped Martin.

"And de launch!" groaned Scipio.

Both were gone!

XXVI. THE ESCAPE FROM THE CAVE

For some moments no one spoke again. The three simply stood and stared at the dark, heaving water in the tunnel. A few shattered remains of the plane floated up amid the turmoil, but both that and the launch were gone. The catastrophe had been so sudden and overwhelming that it left them in a state of dull despair.

The Professor was the first to speak.

“I am afraid this means the end of us,” he said, very quietly.

“It’s jest de eberlasting finish,” groaned Scipio.

Martin shook himself as if trying to rouse out of a bad dream.

“No,” he said sharply. “We must not give up. The Lemurians are sending a galley for us.”

Professor Histin looked up in surprise.

“A galley?” he repeated.

“Yes. Oh, they are quite friendly now. But I’ll tell you all about that later. The galley started before I did. I passed her about halfway here. I don’t suppose she can make it in this darkness, but she ought to be here in the morning. What we have to do is to find the safest place we can, and wait until morning. As soon as it’s light she’ll reach the island.”

“If dere is any island,” put in Scipio dolefully. “De Professor, he say de whole place gwine to blow up like a gunpowder bar’l wen de match drops in.”

“Don’t kick,” said Martin sharply. “It hasn’t blown up yet, and I dare say it will last till we are taken off. The question is, do we stay here where we are out of the way of the ash and smoke, or do we get outside somewhere? What do you say, Professor?”

“I should say that we should be distinctly safer outside,” answered the Professor in his calm, dry way. “Another shock such as the last is very likely to bring the roof down, and even if it does not fall upon us it may block our way out. Remember that we cannot leave by the harbor now that our boats are gone.”

Martin looked round, and his eyes fell on the mass of broken rock from the roof which covered the steps behind them.

"I expect you're right, sir. Then I suppose we'd best go out by the way leading to the garden?"

"We must try that," replied the Professor.

"Then the sooner the better," said Martin briskly; "a narrow passage like that is easily blocked." He led the way back up the steps, and the others followed. The electric lights were still burning, casting their clear, white glow over the rubbish strewn on the floor of the Pillared Hall. Small pieces were still falling in every direction; and no wonder, for the whole place—floor, sides and roof—quivered continually, exactly like the lid of a boiling kettle, and the explosions went on at rapid intervals. Though they could not hear, they could feel them plainly.

"We'd better get some grub," said Martin. "There won't be much left outside. Some water, too."

"Dere ain't much water, Marse Martin," said Scipio. "De stream done stopped when de fust big shake came. And most ob de rest I put in de launch tanks. Still, I reckon dere's some in de jug."

He ran through the living-room into the kitchen and came out with a big bottle full of water.

"Dat's all dere's left," he said. "And I got a tin ob beef an' a few biscuits."

"Better than nothing," replied Martin cheerfully. He knew better than the others what was before them outside, and was anxious to keep up their spirits.

They made their way down the tunnel leading to the garden entrance. The rock quivered horribly, but happily the roof was still sound. As they got near the entrance the roaring of the volcano became dreadful.

"Sounds like some ugly great debbil was awaiting for us," said Scipio, with a shiver of dread.

The Professor unlocked the gate, and they stepped out into a darkness that might be felt. So thick was the air with smoke and ashes that even the lurid glare from the great pit of fire, barely two miles away, was hardly visible. Just as they got outside there was another convulsion. A vast sheet of dull red flame lifted itself into the night, and the tortured island shook with the fierce shock of it. The Professor would have fallen had not Martin caught and held him.

And then—a heavy thud close by followed by a series of splintering crashes!

"My golly! Dat mountain's a-throwing rocks at us!" gasped Scipio.

"Scipio is right," said the Professor to Martin. "It will be best to remain under cover in the mouth of the tunnel."

"I suppose it will," replied Martin, and the three moved back into shelter, and sat down on the bare rock floor of the passage.

Martin looked at his wrist watch. It was a little past eleven. Seven hours to dawn, and nothing to do but wait.

It was the longest and most terrible night that any of them had ever passed. The din was frightful, the air almost unbreathable, and about two in the morning the last bit of comfort, the electric light, went out, leaving them in black darkness, lit only by the glare of explosions from the crater.

The crash and thunder of these were deafening, and at times it seemed as if the whole island was going to pieces beneath them.

They tried to talk, but the foul gases in the air caught their throats and parched their mouths so that they could hardly speak. At times each had a sip of lukewarm water from the bottle, but as this was all they had they were obliged to be very careful with it. As for food none of them could touch it.

Luckily for them the roof of the tunnel was solid rock, and in spite of the constant earthquakes did not break or fall.

The worst of things comes to an end, and at last a sickly yellow light began to break through the foul gloom, and they knew that somewhere the sun was shining. Martin touched the Professor's arm.

"Time to be moving," he said quietly.

The Professor staggered to his feet. The horrors of the night had left him very weak and helpless. Martin took his arm and held him firmly. "A bit stiff," said the old man hoarsely. He was as plucky as they make them, and would not give in.

"It's not so bad as it was," Martin said hopefully. "The explosions are less violent, and there are no more stones falling."

"An' dat's a mighty good job, too," put in Scipio. "De Professor say my skull mighty thick, but I jest know one of dem rocks would dent it bad."

In spite of everything Martin laughed, and the three men moved slowly through the deep ash in the direction of the sea.

The whole face of the island was changed. Not a green thing was to be seen anywhere. The drifts of ash were knee-deep in places, while great black, burnt-looking rocks littered the ground in every direction. But the worst of it was the huge cracks and crevices which seamed the torn earth in every direction. Some gaped six feet wide, running down to fearful depths.

The little party had to probe the ground with a stick before each step, for many of these cracks were so hidden under the masses of ash that they might have walked into one without seeing it.

The Professor glanced up the slope to where some skeleton trunks stood out above the blackened waste.

"My poor garden!" he said sadly.

Martin's heart ached for him. All these years of work gone within a few hours. And the Professor was too old to start again—at least in this life.

"There's the sea!" said Martin, pointing. He wanted to get the Professor's thoughts off the ruin of the once beautiful island.

There was the sea indeed—but such a sea! As far as eye could reach, it was gray with floating ash. Banks of foul vapor hung in the heavy air. The whole sky was clouded with smoke from the crater.

"It's getting lighter," continued Martin, trying to speak cheerfully. "And there's a little air moving. I dare say we shall soon be able to see the galley."

"Let us get out upon the point over there," said the Professor. "We shall get a good view from that height, and we shall be farther from the crater, too."

Martin nodded, and they started away to the left. It took them an hour, and the Professor was very weary before they reached it. Martin made him sit down under a projecting shelf of rock facing the sea, and gave him a little water.

By this time the air was clearer. A good breeze was blowing from the north-west, and the horizon was rapidly widening. The volcano, too, seemed to have done its worst. The eruptions were less frequent and less violent.

Scipio had climbed to the highest point, and stood watching the sea. Presently they heard him yell.

"Dere's the ship, boss! I done see him!" Martin leaped up beside him. Sure enough there was the galley some six or seven miles away. Martin stared at her.

“What’s dem folk doing, Marse Martin?” asked Scipio, with a puzzled frown. “Dey ain’t a-coming dis way!”

“You’re right,” replied Martin, slowly. “I can’t make it out. They’re going away to the north.” His field-glasses were slung in a case at his side. He took them out and focussed them on the vessel. Now he could see her plainly. He noticed that the oars were rising and falling very slowly, and that she was moving at a mere crawl.

“Scipio, she can’t get here,” he said dully.

“For de goodness sake, why not?” demanded Scipio.

“The weed. The weed has been driven in by some freak of the current, or, more likely, by the tidal wave. It’s all round the island, a regular barrier.”

Scipio’s black face turned a slaty gray. His eyes were full of fear.

“Den we’s got to stay hyah, boss?”

“It looks like it,” replied Martin heavily.

“Who’s gwine to tell the Professor?” demanded Scipio.

For answer Martin turned and scrambled down the rock.

The Professor, tired out, was dozing in his refuge. His old face looked deeply lined and worn. But there was no use in putting off the ill tidings. Martin roused him and told him what had happened.

For a moment the Professor looked badly frightened, but only for a moment. Then he was his quiet self again.

“My poor boy!” he said quietly.

“Me! Never mind about me,” returned Martin. “It’s you I’m thinking about.”

The professor shook his head.

“It matters little about me, Martin. My race is nearly run. It is different for a boy like you. But we will not give up,” he continued. “The eruption seems to be over. The cave is still safe, and there is food in it. Let us go back and see what we can do.”

Martin shook his head.

“You forget, sir,” he said. “There may be food, but there is no water. The stream has stopped, and that was our only source of supply. If we can’t find some way of getting off the island I am afraid that we are done for.”

XXVII. IN THE NICK OF TIME

Some hours had passed. The air was much clearer, and the volcano was certainly quieting down. But in the stronger light the look of the island was more desolate and dreadful than ever.

Martin and Scipio had got the Professor back into the cave, then had climbed the mountain to the very source of the brook. There was no brook any longer. Not a drop of water was left, while the fierce heat of the eruption had so entirely destroyed the snow-cap of the mountain that even if they had climbed the precipices, they could not have got any ice to melt down.

As for the galley, she had disappeared over the horizon. Her people had done their best to get through, but no ship that ever floated could have pierced the great barrier of weed. Without the plane Lost Island was as completely shut off from Lemuria as if it had been on the other side of the world.

Martin and Scipio were both suffering tortures from thirst. They had saved the little drop of water left for the Professor. Unless it rained—and that seemed very unlikely—they were doomed to die the most horrible of deaths.

Coming back to the cave after their fruitless climb, Scipio was very down in the mouth.

“It ain’t so much about myself I’se worrying, Marse Martin,” he said; “it’s de Professor what I got on my mind. Yo’ see, I always done cooked for him nicely, but now I can’t cook no more ’cos dere ain’t no water to cook with.”

“We mustn’t give up,” answered Martin. “The Lemurians will do all they know to get through the weed. The priest is a clever man, and he won’t leave us to die if he can help it.”

“Den oughtn’t we to hab a watch out?” suggested Scipio.

“You’re right, Scipio. We ought. You wait outside and I’ll relieve you when I’ve seen the Professor.”

Scipio nodded. Martin went into the cave. He found the Professor in the ruins of the workshop.

"I am trying to build a still," he said feebly. "Then we could distil some sea water. The worst of it is I have no copper piping. Also, most of my tools are buried."

"I'll help," said Martin hoarsely. His throat was so dry he could hardly speak, and he felt dreadfully ill. Personally, he hardly believed he could last till morning.

But he stuck to it pluckily, and by the light of an oil lamp the two worked desperately among the dust and ruins.

At last the Professor threw up his hands.

"It is useless," he said sadly. "We can do nothing. Martin, I fear that this is the end."

He staggered suddenly, and Martin caught him as he sank down fainting on the stone floor.

"He's right. This is the end," muttered Martin bitterly. "If I could only have paid off those creditors of father's I shouldn't have minded so much. It does seem hard luck, with all that gold waiting for me on the other island."

Quite worn out, he dropped down beside the insensible body of the Professor.

"Boss! Boss! Marse Martin!" It was Scipio who came flying in from outside. His eyeballs were rolling horribly, and he was looking fearfully excited.

"What is it?" asked Martin, getting up. "What's the matter?"

"Matter is dat de submarine's came back," shouted Scipio.

Martin looked at him.

"You're crazy," he said.

"Crazy? I ain't crazy. I swar to goodness I ain't. It's de trufe I'm telling. De submarine's back hyar in de harbor. I seed Cap'n Krieger standing up on her deck."

"But she was sunk years ago," argued Martin.

"Can't help dat, sah. She's floating all right dis berry minute. Yo' come and see for yo'self."

A thrill of excitement roused Martin. Seizing a lamp, he sprang up, and ran stumbling out of the place. And there, rising out of the dark, scummy water, was the long, narrow deck of a submarine surmounted by a conning tower. The hatch was open, and on the tower stood a square, burly-

looking, clean-shaven man whom Martin recognized instantly from his photograph as the Professor's old Danish friend and partner, Captain Krieger.

"What did I tell yo', Marse Martin?" came Scipio's triumphant voice from behind.

Martin stood staring dazedly at Captain Krieger. He realized that Krieger was calling to Scipio, but could not hear what he said. Queer black specks danced before his eyes. Suddenly his knees folded up, all the strength went out of him, and he slipped quietly down on the dust covered rock.

"It seems like a miracle, Krieger. Even now I can hardly believe my senses."

The voice which came faintly to Martin's ears was that of the Professor. Slowly the boy opened his eyes, and the first thing he knew was that he was lying in a comfortable bunk in a cabin, that the Professor was opposite in another bunk, and that close by sat Captain Krieger in a canvas chair. The place was lit by electric light, and by the low, deep hum of the electric motors Martin knew they were under way traveling submerged.

Martin himself felt very comfortable. All that horrid, rasping dryness was gone from his throat and mouth, but he was limp and drowsy, and disinclined to move. He lay quiet and listened.

"It's a long story, Distin," answered Krieger. "I don't wonder you thought the *Saga* was lost. As a matter of fact, she nearly was on more than one occasion. We were once in a minefield for twenty-four hours, and how we got out safely I hardly know to this day. But I reached Copenhagen safely, and, finding that my country remained neutral, I went to England and offered my services. The Admiralty accepted me, and I fancy I did my part in helping to crush that wolf pack that was ravaging Europe."

"But why did you not return as soon as the Armistice was signed?" inquired the Professor.

"I had been ill. It was in an air raid. A bomb fell close to me, and though I was not much hurt the shock upset me completely. For the time I lost my memory altogether. It was only in March last that I recovered, and then I tried to get you by wireless, but could not hit your wave length. I returned to Denmark, but found the *Saga* in very bad condition, and it was most difficult to get repairs effected. Besides, to tell you the truth, I had not much money left."

“It took months to get the work done, and even now she is none too seaworthy. It was all we could do to make the trip under the weed.”

“But you did it,” said the Professor gratefully. “You did it, and arrived in the very nick of time. Although the eruption was practically over, we could hardly have survived another twenty-four hours. We had finished our last drop of water.”

“I am thankful indeed that we were in time,” replied the captain gravely. He paused.

“This young Vaile,” he went on—“he seems to have done his best for you.”

“He is one in a thousand,” declared the Professor. “The staunchest youngster I ever met. I love him as my own son.”

Martin turned over.

“Hulloa, Professor!” he said.

Professor Distin sat up in his bunk.

“My dear lad, how are you?” he asked.

“First rate, thanks,” answered Martin. “I was an awful duffer to collapse like that.”

“H’m!” grunted Krieger. “I fancy most boys of your age would have collapsed a good deal earlier in the game. Mr. Vaile, I am extremely pleased to meet you and to thank you for all you have done for my dear old friend here.”

“I think the boot’s on the other foot, sir,” replied Martin blushing. “It’s the Professor who’s been good to me.”

“A mutual admiration society,” said Captain Krieger, with a twinkle in his eye. “Suppose that we suspend compliments for the present, and devote ourselves to plans? I may as well tell you that I propose to make for America. It is closer than England, and an easier voyage for a battered old craft like this.”

Martin sat up sharply.

“But we must go to Lemuria first,” he said.

Captain Krieger turned and looked at him in evident surprise.

“Impossible, Mr. Vaile,” he answered. “We are already far under the weed. We could spare neither oxygen nor fuel to turn back.”

Martin stared at Krieger and there was dismay in his face.

“But the gold,” he said.

“What gold?”

“Hymer the priest and Akon had promised me all the gold I wanted,” groaned Martin. “Didn’t you tell him, Professor?”

“I?” said the Professor. “I knew nothing of this.”

“No, I forgot,” said Martin sadly. “In all the excitement of the eruption I forgot about it. But after Odan was killed and his rebellion crushed, the prince and Hymer said I could have all the gold I liked. You know what I wanted it for, Professor?”

“Yes, to pay those creditors of your father’s—those people his partner, Morton Willard, swindled over that Cleansand settlement in Florida.”

Captain Krieger looked from one to the other. He was frowning, and evidently much distressed.

“I only wish I had known. Naturally, I kept clear of Lemuria, for I always looked upon her people as hostile. Now it is too late, for we are halfway to the open sea.”

Martin was silent, but the look on his face showed how bitter was his disappointment. He had counted above all things upon getting that gold, and with it clearing his father’s name. Besides, now that Lost Island was destroyed, the Professor was left practically penniless, and Captain Krieger too, as well as Scipio, would need to be provided for.

“Cannot we return?” asked the Professor. “Cannot we rise outside the weed, replenish our air supply, and then dive again and go back to Lemuria?”

“Impossible, Distin. We have barely enough oil to take us to the nearest port,” answered the captain.

“What is the nearest port?”

“Key West, the southernmost city of Florida.”

“So you are going to Florida?” said Martin sadly.

“There is no choice, my boy,” replied Captain Krieger. “We must make for the nearest point at which we can refill our tanks.”

“And what then?” asked the Professor. “What shall we do next?”

“Sell the old *Saga* for what she will fetch and make the best of our way back to Europe, I suppose,” replied Captain Krieger grimly. “That at least is all that I can suggest. To tell you the truth, Distin, I don’t think that you and I have a hundred pounds between us and the workhouse.”

“We will not despair, Krieger. It is true that matters seem serious. Still, our lives are safe, and I am convinced that in some way or other we

shall find means of livelihood.”

XXVIII. MOBBED

Martin stood upon the deck of the *Saga* as she plowed her way over the surface of a brilliantly blue sea, the small waves sparkling under a cloudless sky.

"So that's Key West," he said, gazing at the brightly painted houses which lined the flat shores of the bay.

"The people have spotted us already," he continued. "I suppose they take us for one of their own naval craft."

"Yes. We had better show our colors," said Captain Krieger.

"Remember! Not a word about the island, Captain," said Martin.

"No need to remind me of that, Martin. In any case my papers show my port of departure as Copenhagen. There will be no trouble on that score."

Martin stared at the town a minute in silence. Then he turned again to Captain Krieger.

"What are we going to do, sir?" he asked.

"Raise some money, Martin. The only way to get back to Lemuria is by submarine or airship. An airship is out of the question, so our only chance is to get together cash enough to repair the poor old *Saga* and put her in proper order. Then we'll go back and help ourselves to the gold which your kind friend Hymer has offered us."

"How much is it going to cost?" asked Martin.

"I think I can make her thoroughly seaworthy for a matter of five or six hundred pounds English money," was the reply.

Martin shook his head. "I don't know where it's to come from," he said. "It's no use going to any American with a story like ours. They simply wouldn't believe it, and we haven't a shadow of proof to offer."

"That's true," allowed the Captain. "All the same, when we get ashore I mean to hustle around and see what I can do."

They were in harbor in another hour. The American port authorities were very civil, and gave them a clean bill of health. Martin took the

Professor ashore to the Magnolia Hotel. The old gentleman was far from well, and Martin wanted doctor's advice for him.

Martin registered in the hotel book, giving his own name and that of the Professor. It did not occur to him to do anything else. Then he went out and found a doctor and brought him back to see the Professor.

As he came through the hall of the hotel a keen faced American stepped towards him.

"You Mr. Vaile?" he asked.

"That's my name," replied Martin, rather surprised.

"My name's Ladd. I'm from the Key West 'Argus'. I'd like a word with you."

"In a minute," replied Martin. "I must take the doctor up first."

The other nodded. "I'll be right here," he said.

Martin left the doctor to overhaul the Professor, and went down again.

"Say," remarked Mr. Ladd, drawing Martin aside. "You any relation of Mr. Vaile of Willard and Vaile?"

Martin started slightly. It had not occurred to him that he would be connected with the Cleansand business. But he was not going to deny it.

"I am Mr. Vaile's son," he answered quietly.

The other gave a low whistle.

"Say, but you've got a cheek to come here to Florida!"

Martin drew himself up.

"Let me tell you this, Mr. Ladd," he said curtly—"my father was perfectly innocent. He had no knowledge whatever of that cruel and abominable swindle. The whole thing was worked by his partner, Willard, who took all the money and threw the guilt on my father."

Ladd shrugged his shoulders.

"You got any proof of that?" he asked.

"No; but I mean to get it," answered Martin sternly. "That's what I'm here for."

"It'll take some getting," said Ladd dryly. He paused and looked at Martin.

"See here, young fellow," he said. "I've no doubt you believe what you've told me. All the same, you take a tip from me, and clear right out of this State quick as ever you can. There's three hundred families lost near all

they had through that Cleansand swindle, and just as soon as they hear your name a lot of 'em will be out gunning for you."

Martin gasped as if someone had thrown a bucket of cold water over him. It was not fear for himself. That was the last thing he thought of. The horror of it was to feel that three hundred families—more than a thousand people—ruined by this Cleansand swindle all believed that his father was guilty of their ruin.

"Makes you feel a bit sick, eh?" remarked Ladd, who was watching Martin keenly.

Martin drew a long breath.

"It's awful," he said slowly. "But if you had known my father as I do, you would have been as certain as I am that he never had anything to do with this horrible business."

The other nodded. "I like to see a chap stand up for his dad," he said. "Say, now, is it a fact that you gave up all that was left you to your father's creditors?"

"Of course I did!" returned Martin indignantly. "And if you know anyone who has lost his money at Cleansand Bay, why you can just tell him I mean to pay back every penny."

Ladd stared at Martin.

"You'll need a heap of money," he said dryly.

"And I'll get a heap of money!" retorted Martin. "I could get it in a month if—"

He pulled himself up short.

"No, I can't tell you how," he said. "And you wouldn't believe me if I did. But I'll get it and I'll pay them, then I'll settle accounts with Morton Willard."

"You've got to find him first," said Ladd. "Well, like your spirit, sonny, and if there's anything I can do you call me up at the 'Argus' office. Here's my card. All the same, if I were you, I'd quit this State right off. It's not going to be a health resort for anyone named Vaile."

He nodded and strolled off, and just then the doctor, whose name was Curtis, came down. He and Martin went into the sitting-room, which was empty at the moment, and Martin asked Dr. Curtis what he thought of the Professor.

"Nothing wrong with him except old age, Mr. Vaile," was the answer. "But he's a little old for traveling around in a submarine, as I understood

he's been doing. What he wants now is a few days in bed, plenty of sleep and good nourishing food. But he'll need a bit of looking after. Shall I send in a nurse?"

"No need for that," Martin answered. "His colored man will look after him."

"All right," said Dr. Curtis. "I guess I won't need to see him again unless you send for me."

Martin thanked him, paid his fee, and went back to the submarine to fetch Scipio. On the way it seemed to him that several people looked at him oddly. He felt hot and uncomfortable. For the first time in his life he was ashamed.

Captain Krieger arrived back at the dock just as Martin reached it. He was looking tired and dejected.

"Not a dollar to be got anywhere, Martin," he said. "I was counting on a rich cigar manufacturer I know, a man called Stuyvesant. But he's in New York, and won't be back for a month or more. No one else will look at any security I have to offer. I tried to borrow money on the *Saga* herself, but now the war is over no one wants a submarine."

He glanced at Martin.

"You're looking a bit down, too, lad," he said. "What's wrong?"

Martin told him.

"You'd have done better to register under another name," said Krieger gravely. "This will make things all the more difficult for us, and sure as fate that reporter will write up a story about you in his paper. Then all the town will know, and there will be the mischief to pay. Now, I think you had better take Scipio up to the hotel, then come back here to supper, and we will have a talk."

Martin agreed, and he and Scipio went back together to the Magnolia. As they went they saw bare-footed colored boys selling the evening paper in the streets, and by the rapidity with which the copies were being snapped up it was clear that there was news of more than common interest.

Even so Martin was not prepared for what was going to happen.

When he reached the hotel, the proprietor met him.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Vaile," he said, "but I'll have to ask you to leave my hotel. You see, they all know who you are now, and it's only asking for trouble for you to stay here in my place."

Martin went rather white.

“Very well,” he said, with dignity. “I will leave at once. All I ask is that you will take good care of Professor Distin. He at least is no relation of mine or of my father.”

The proprietor assured him that the Professor would be all right, and Martin, after a word or two with Scipio, went out again and walked quickly back towards the wharf.

Now there was no doubt about his being recognized. He saw people pointing at him.

“That’s him!” a boy shouted. “That’s the son o’ the swindler.”

Martin saw that he was being followed, but he would not run. It would seem as if he was guilty. He did not like the look of things, and so he walked as quickly as he could.

There are no stones in Florida, but some heavy object came whizzing past his head.

“Are you chaps going to stand for this?” came a loud, harsh voice. “Are you going to let this swindler’s brat walk around your town like he owned it? Get hold of him. Teach him you won’t have his sort around. Chuck him in the harbor.”

There was a shout, a rush of feet. Martin began to run, but it was too late. They were all around him—as rough a looking gang of wharf rats as ever he had seen, and led by a tall, swarthy Cuban. He was the man who had called on them to fling Martin off the wharf.

Something about him seemed vaguely familiar to Martin, but there was no time to think. Martin knew that he was in real danger. Seeing he could not escape, he sprang to one side, got his back against the wall of a warehouse, and turned to bay. He had not even a stick—nothing but his fists. How he wished he had Akon or Hymer beside him!

A bullet-headed mulatto, with an ugly, scarred face, made a rush at him. Martin hit him under the jaw, and sent him staggering back against the next man. Both went down together.

The other paused an instant, and Martin leaped forward and drove his fist into the face of a third. But at that moment another got behind him and kicked his legs from under him. He went down in the dust with the whole pack on top of him.

XXIX. THE RESCUE

The last thing Martin heard as he went down beneath the gang was the shrill blast of a whistle. Then he was fighting for dear life, trying to hold off a pair of horny hands which clutched at his throat.

The very number of attackers was in his favor. The men fell over each other, and got in one another's way.

"Get up, you fools!" snarled the voice of the tall Cuban. "Out of my way. Let me get at him!"

Martin, half-stunned and breathless, saw the tall figure loom above him, caught the dull glint of a knife blade, and knew that worse than a ducking threatened him. With a last frantic effort he writhed aside, and, seizing the nearest body, pulled it down on top of him.

The Cuban snarled like an angry dog, and, catching hold of the man whom Martin held, tried to tear him from his grasp.

A loud shout came from somewhere at the quay end of the alley. There was a sound of running feet.

"Beat it!" yelled one of the gang. "The cops!" Like a flash the gang melted away, all but the man whom Martin held and the tall Cuban, who still struggled frantically to drag him away.

"Is that you, Martin?" came Captain Krieger's anxious voice, and at the sound the Cuban let go and turned to fly.

Quick as thought, Martin stretched out one arm and caught him by the ankle. He tripped and came down, thud, upon the sand, and Martin, hurling aside the man who was on top of him, sprang up and flung himself upon the leader of the gang.

At that very moment Captain Krieger, with three other men, came tearing up.

"This is the man," panted Martin breathlessly. "Hold him! Don't let him go! He's the one who set them on me."

"Let me go!" gasped the Cuban. "You're not police. You've no right to hold me."

“If we ain’t got the right we’ve got the might,” came the dry voice of Mr. Ladd. “Say, Captain,” he added, “here’s a bit o’ cord. Tie his thumbs behind his back. That’s the way to fix vermin of his sort.”

“Are you hurt, Martin?” asked Captain Krieger anxiously.

“Nothing to signify,” Martin assured him, “but that long chap would have knifed me if you hadn’t come when you did. How did you get on my track?”

“It was Mr. Ladd here. Seems he was watching you. He ran down to the wharf and called us.”

“I’m very grateful to you, Mr. Ladd,” said Martin frankly.

“You don’t need to be,” laughed the other. “I reckon I’m going to get a story for my paper that’ll pay me for my bit of trouble. But, see here, Mr. Vaile, this here Cuban ain’t one of the chaps that got stuck over the Cleansand Bay business. They were all white men. Who is he, anyway?”

“Just what I’m wondering,” said Martin. “To tell you the truth, I thought I recognized his voice. Bring him into the light and I’ll soon see if I know his face.”

At the end of the alley they came out upon the wharf, where electric lamps were now alight. In spite of his resistance, they hauled the man roughly under the nearest lamp.

“Now then, Mr. Vaile,” said Ladd, “who is he?”

Martin stared at the fellow a moment. His eyes widened with amazement.

“Why—why,” he gasped, in utter astonishment, “it’s Morton Willard!”

“Your late father’s partner?” snapped Ladd.

“That’s who it is,” declared Martin. “He’s darkened his face, but I’d know him anywhere.”

He turned on Willard.

“You blackguard!” he cried hotly. “So, having got rid of my father, you thought you’d kill me and go free!”

“You are wrong,” answered Willard, who was glancing this way and that, like a trapped rat. “It wasn’t my fault. I had nothing to do with it. Let me go!”

“A likely story,” said Ladd dryly. “See here, Vaile, this is going to be mightily interesting. Now, what do you reckon to do about it? Of course,

you can hand Willard here over to the police, if you've a mind to, and charge him with assaulting you, but I wouldn't do that."

"What would you do?" asked Martin.

"Take him along to that craft of yours and keep him," replied Ladd significantly. "Maybe he'll talk then."

"I won't! You shall not do it! You have no right!" cried Willard fiercely.

Captain Krieger chuckled grimly.

"You're right, Mr. Ladd. The *Saga* is a better prison than any lock-up in this town. Bring him along, men."

In spite of his struggles, Willard was rushed over the edge of the wharf, down the steps, and two minutes later was safely lodged in the body of the submarine.

Ladd saw him fastened up, then turned to the others.

"Good night," he said. "You've done a mighty good stroke of work this evening. Now, see here. I'm going to busy myself getting evidence against this galoot, but I'll be round again some time tomorrow."

He was turning to go when Willard spoke again.

"Stop!" he said hoarsely. "Wait a minute! There are things I can tell you!"

"I guessed he'd weaken," said Ladd scornfully. "Wal, out with it, Willard!"

"No, not if you are going to prosecute. Unless I have your promise that you won't prosecute, I will not say a word."

"That's a mighty queer bargain," replied Ladd in his driest tone. "How's Mr. Vaile here to know you've got anything to tell that's worth his while to hear?"

Willard's sallow face worked nervously. Blackguard as he was, there was precious little pluck in his make-up.

"It's well worth his hearing," he insisted. "He'd give anything to hear it."

"I can't imagine anything you have to say being worth hearing," said Martin in disgust.

"It's about your father," Willard said.

"My father is dead," answered Martin curtly.

Willard's narrow eyes were fixed on Martin.

"How do you know he is dead?" he asked.

Martin started.

"You wired me yourself," he snapped.

Willard paused. There was an ugly smile on his thin lips.

"Supposing," he said slowly—"supposing I told you that he was not dead at all?"

Martin stared at the man. For a moment he could not speak. The shock was so great it left him breathless.

Ladd was the first to find his voice.

"Are you meaning to tell us that Mr. Vaile is still alive?" he demanded.

"I said he might be," snarled the other, "but I'll not tell you another thing unless I have your word you won't prosecute."

"Promise him anything if he'll tell," cried Martin. "I'd give all I have on earth to know that my father was alive and well."

"Go slow," advised Ladd. "Just remember that if you refuse to prosecute this galoot, your father's liable to be arrested if he is alive. It's like this. While none of us here doubt that Willard and not your father was responsible for the Cleansand swindle, other folk won't think the same."

"I can't help that," said Martin doggedly. "I'd give anything to find my father alive."

Ladd shrugged his shoulders.

"Just as you like, Vaile. It's your picnic, not mine. And one way or another, it will make just as good news for my paper."

He turned to Willard.

"You're safe from me," he said, "so far as the law goes, but that don't alter my opinion that you're the dirtiest skunk that ever walked on two legs. Now, then, out with it. Is Mr. Vaile alive, and, if so, where is he?"

"He is alive," answered Willard. "But he's in a place that you can't get to unless I tell you where it is."

Martin's face lit up.

"Father alive? Then I shall see him again," he said hoarsely.

Captain Krieger cut in. Of course Martin had long ago told him the whole story.

"Then you will take us to him, Mr. Morton Willard," he said sternly. "At once, too. And if you don't, I'll promise you this—that even if you are not handed over to the law, as you richly deserve to be, I, personally, will give you such a thrashing that you will be sorry you were not in prison."

The iron determination in his tone cowed Willard completely.

"I will take you there," he said sullenly, "but when I have done that, I have your promise that I am to go free?"

"You have it," said Martin curtly. "We will start in the morning."

XXX. IN THE HEART OF THE GLADES

Four people paddled a large canoe up a narrow waterway fringed on either side with tall gray saw-grass. The water, smooth as glass, reflected the crimson rays of a blazing sunset. Overhead a flight of snowy flamingos winged their way, while big fish rose with heavy plopping splashes.

"It's mighty hot," remarked one of the paddlers. It was Mr. Ladd. He stopped paddling, mopped his forehead and rolled himself a cigarette. "Guess we've earned a stand easy," he said.

Martin, whose face and arms were burnt to the color of an old saddle, looked at Willard, who was sitting sullenly in the stern of the canoe.

"How far have we to go?" he demanded.

Willard pointed to a clump of tall palms which were just visible across the desert of swamp and saw-grass which made up the Florida Everglades. "That's the island," he said.

Ladd dropped his cigarette as if it had been a hot coal, and snatched up his paddle.

"That's Manatee Island, is it? Great snakes, why didn't you say so before?"

"No one asked me," answered Willard sulkily.

The look Ladd gave him was not a pleasant one, but he did not speak again. He dipped his paddle deep, and, as the other three followed suit, the canoe went away as if she had an engine in her, leaving a boiling wake behind.

The clump of palms rose quickly into sight, the saw-grass opened, and showed a wide lagoon with an island about a mile across lying in its center.

Martin could hardly breathe for excitement. This was Manatee Island, the lonely scrap of land deep in the heart of the great Everglades, in which, according to Willard, Martin's father had been left a prisoner in the hands of a band of Seminole Indians.

If he were still alive he and his son would meet within another five minutes.

Ladd stopped paddling again and stared towards the island, shading his eyes with his hand from the glare of the setting sun.

"Say, Vaile," he remarked, "there's a bunch of Indians down by the landing. But I see no white man among 'em."

The Seminoles of the Everglades are a poor and rather cowardly lot who live by fishing. On Manatee Island there were only about twenty all told, and, so far from offering any resistance, they crowded round the canoe, begging for tobacco and cartridges.

Ladd knew how to talk to them. Martin stood by, positively shaking with anxiety as the American ordered them to produce their prisoner.

The chief, a long-haired person who looked as if he had never washed in his life, but who was called by the high-sounding name of Tigertail, looked doubtful.

"What you give me if I bring you white man?" he asked.

"I'll give you the worst hammering you ever had in your life if you don't take us to him double quick," retorted Ladd; and his hand went to his pistol pocket.

Tigertail took the hint.

"All right. You come this way," he answered sulkily.

He led the way back from the beach by a narrow path overhung by enormous live oaks. Great trails of Spanish moss hung from the branches, cutting off the light so that it was almost dark beneath. The ground was wet and swampy, and had a sour, unpleasant smell.

They came out into an open space where one of those strange old shell mounds rose among the trees. Here were some rough huts in which the Indians lived. Tigertail led them to one of these.

"Him white man live here," he grunted.

Martin dashed forward, and flung aside the curtain of skins which covered the door.

A man rose from an old packing-case. He was dressed in rags. His hair was quite white, and so was his untrimmed beard. He stood staring at Martin, as though he saw a ghost.

"You, Martin?" he gasped.

"Dad!" cried Martin, grasping both his father's hands. "Oh, Dad! What have they done to you?"

Mr. Vaile recovered a little.

"Martin, is it really you? But I knew you would find me."

“It’s a miracle I ever did, Dad. That blackguard Willard wired me that you were dead.”

“I thought as much,” returned Mr. Vaile grimly. “Yet I always felt that you would come in search of me. It was only that which kept me going at all. Where is Willard?”

“Outside with Captain Krieger and Mr. Ladd. But I forgot, you don’t even know who they are, and there’s no time to tell you now. What we’ve got to do is to get you away from this beastly place just as quickly as ever we can.”

“I can assure you I am quite ready to go,” answered his father, with the ghost of a smile.

Martin put his strong young arm round his father, and led him out.

“Here he is!” he announced joyfully. “This is Captain Krieger, father, and here is Mr. Ladd. I owe a lot to both of them.”

Martin saw, by their faces, how shocked they were at the appearance of Mr. Vaile. And he himself, seeing now in a stronger light the wreck of the fine man that his father had been only a few months ago, felt his blood boil.

He swung round on Willard.

“This is your doing, you blackguard!” he said fiercely.

Ladd wisely interrupted.

“We promised not to prosecute, sonny,” he remarked mildly. “That was as far as our undertaking went, as I remember. But, see here, there ain’t reason why we shouldn’t leave him right here where he’s left Mr. Vaile all this time—Hi, stop him!” he broke off, and sprang forward; for Willard, with a sudden howl of terror, had turned and bolted out of the glade, and Ladd, quick as he was, was not quite quick enough to catch him.

“After him!” shouted Ladd. “He’s making for the boat. If he reaches it first he’ll get away.”

His words were cut short by a scream. There was the sound of a heavy fall.

Ladd and Martin, racing forward, almost fell over Willard, who lay in the path writhing in agony.

“I’m snake-bit,” he groaned. “A rattler got me.”

XXXI. THE CONFESSION

However much you may hate or despise a man, you forget all that when he is snake-bitten.

Martin dropped down on his knees beside the wretched Willard.

“Where?” he asked quickly.

“My right leg, just above the ankle,” groaned Willard.

Martin had the trouser leg rolled up in a twinkling, and the sock turned down. Sure enough, there were two small punctures about half an inch apart. They were red and angry, and the flesh around the marks was already beginning to puff.

Martin snatched out a handkerchief, tied it round the leg just above the bite, and, picking up a short piece of stick, began twisting the bandage as tightly as he could.

“That’s right, sonny,” said Ladd. “Say, I’ve got a syringe with permanganate in my pocket. Wait a jiffy. I’ll fix him.”

As he spoke he took the hypodermic syringe out of its case, then, pushing the point well under the skin of Willard’s calf, injected a good dose of its contents.

They carried him into one of the huts, and there he lay in a heap, almost insensible.

“It’s fright,” whispered Ladd to Martin. “He’s plumb scared. I’ve known chaps to die of fright, and it looks to me like this galoot was going to do it. Myself, I don’t believe it was a rattler at all, but just a moccasin. A moccasin’s bad enough, but not near so bad as a rattler.” It looked as if Ladd was right. Willard was so terrified that he made no sort of fight for life. He collapsed like a pricked bladder.

Two hours passed. Night had fallen, but a big fire blazed outside the hut. The party had cooked their supper and were eating it when Ladd, who had been watching Willard, came out.

“Say, Martin, I reckon Willard’s going. But he’s sensible and reckons he wants to make a confession. He’s told me enough to clear your Dad, and

I've written it down. I reckon, if he signs it and Captain Krieger here witnesses it, the job's as good as done."

Martin sprang to his feet.

"If he clears Dad, I'll forgive him everything," he declared.

"And so will I," said Mr. Vaile. "Indeed, I can find in my heart to be sorry for the wretched man. This is a terrible way in which to die. Go in, Krieger, and witness his confession."

Someone came up through the narrow hatch of the *Saga*, and Martin, who was standing on the deck, fishing for mullet, looked round.

His eyes widened.

"Great Scott! Is that you, Dad? Upon my word, I'd never have known you."

Mr. Vaile, clean shaven, with his hair cut and dressed in neat white drill, was a different figure from the worn, white-haired man whom they had brought in on the previous night that even his son might be excused for not recognizing him.

He smiled.

"I feel better," he said. "Where's Ladd?"

Martin winked.

"I'm not to tell you. As a matter of fact, I don't know. All that I know is that he took Willard off somewhere this morning, and when he comes back Willard won't be with him."

"I am glad," said Mr. Vaile gravely. "Since Willard has handed over the money he stole to be restored to his victims, I would not have him in prison. It is amazing how quickly he recovered, once he had got that confession off his mind. He will have a chance now of starting again, and after the lesson he has had I think he will be a better man."

"I hope so, too, Dad. But what about us? Seems to me we are rather at a loose end. We haven't more than enough between us to pay the Professor's hotel and doctor's bill."

"We must not complain," replied his father. "We are together again. Somehow we shall find means of repairing this vessel, and getting back to Lemuria."

Martin shrugged his shoulders, then laughed.

"Yes, luck's been good to us so far. Must have been those lucky stones Akon gave me, and which, by the way, I've never looked at from that day to this."

“Wait,” he added. “I’ll go and fetch them. Perhaps, if we put them out in the light, they’ll bring us fresh fortune.”

Slipping through the hatch, he dropped down the ladder, to return in a few minutes with the little leathern bag which Prince Akon had given him.

“Here they are,” he said.

Mr. Vaile took the bag, opened it and turned the contents into his open hand.

He gave a gasp of astonishment.

“Luck stones?” he exclaimed. “Good Heavens, Martin, look at them!”

Martin looked, and his eyes fairly goggled.

“They’re pearls!” he exclaimed hoarsely.

“Pearls,” repeated his father—“pearls, and the finest I ever set eyes upon. Twenty—twenty-five—there are thirty-three of them, and the smallest worth at least two thousand dollars!”

For a moment the two stood silent, staring at the beautiful gems which gleamed softly in the morning sunlight.

Suddenly Martin laughed.

“The luck holds,” he said. “The luck holds. Now I shall be able to do what I have always wanted to do—take you and the Professor to Lemuria and introduce you to Akon and Hymer. Dad, it’s going to be the jolliest holiday you ever had in your life.”

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