

The Monster of the Lagoon

By GEORGE F. WORTS

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WHEN Singapore Sammy Shay headed for the South Seas island of Little Nicobar in his schooner, the Blue Goose, he had heard of the unnamed monster that was supposed to inhabit the lagoon of the island, but he had no idea what kind of monster it was. Nobody had, for that matter.

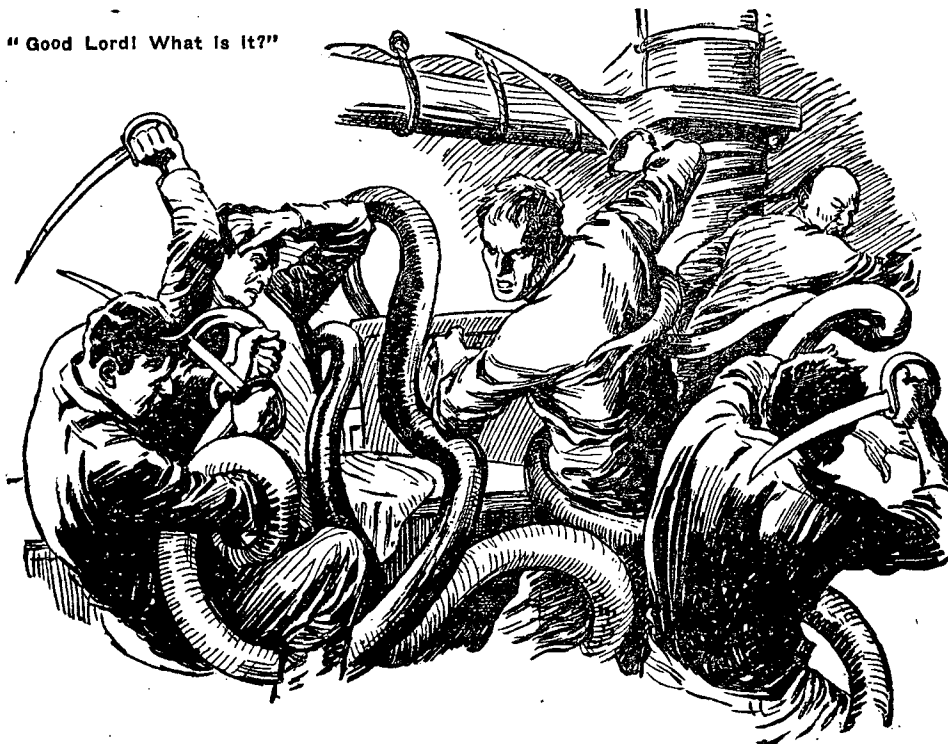
The only thing definite anyone seemed to know was what old Pegleg Pyke told Sammy. Many years before, Pegleg had encountered the monster at night, and although he had not seen it, he had lost a leg to it. Pegleg joined Sam's expedition, which included Lucky Jones, his partner; Professor Bryce Robbins, who wanted to take the monster back alive as a scientific specimen; Laugh-

ing Larry McGurk, the lad who couldn't be killed—although doctors had given him only two more months to live; and two stowaways: Pete Cringle, a young deep-sea diver looking for adventure, and Julie Farrington, who had deserted the yacht Wanderer in Penang to get away from her host, Hector Barling, and her mother, who wanted her to marry Barling.

Pegleg Pyke elected to spend a night in a stone hut on the shore of the lagoon, and in the night he disappeared, although the iron door had been locked from the outside. Determined to discover the nature of the monster, Singapore Sammy decided to run the Blue Goose into the lagoon at night. In the meantime, the Wanderer had come

*The most dangerous, most horrible creature that ever lived
in the sea boards Singapore Sammy's schooner*

"Good Lord! What is it?"



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to the island, and Barling had joined forces with the other hunters after the monster.

CHAPTER XV (Continued).

INTO THE LAGOON.

AS if she were being prepared for sea battle, the Blue Goose was made ready for that dubious expedition into the lagoon. The deck was cleared of all unnecessary objects. All the firearms on board were brought on deck, oiled and loaded. The cutlasses were sharpened.

Each man was assigned his station, and Sammy gave them station drill.

He said, "We don't know what this thing is going to be. We will probably get the scare of our lives. This isn't going to be a Sunday-school picnic."

Bryce said, "Remember this: the creature is not to be killed." He objected to the use of pistols, revolvers and Thompson guns.

"It looks to me more like an errand of slaughter than an expedition of investigation."

"Don't worry," Lucky said, jeeringly, "we'll promise to handle it with kid gloves."

The remainder of the day was spent in bolting into place all the rail bayonets that had not been used—on the theory that if the creature could send a tentacle through a three-inch peephole, or thrust its entire body through, a six-inch space between the bars was too generous.

When this task had been finished, the sun was setting. Ah Fong served supper on deck. The crew of the Blue Goose, pale and apprehensive, ate little. They watched night creep over the lagoon. Mist appeared in wisps and banners. As the darkness increased, the smoky green of the phosphorescence glowed more and more brightly.

The tide would turn at a few minutes after eight. It was Sammy's intention to take the Blue Goose into the lagoon at precisely eight thirty.

Sammy had a final talk with the assembled men. He said: "There's no telling

how dangerous this will be, because we don't know what we're up against. If any of you think we're running too big chances, you can duck now—and nobody will hold it against you. You can stay on the Wanderer. Speak up!"

No one spoke. He said: "Don't kid yourselves. This is dangerous. None of us may come back alive. The thing may even sink this schooner. And it wouldn't be a pleasant death. I'm not trying to scare you, but I'm telling you—it's dangerous."

Still no one spoke. Every man was gazing through the black night at the swimming green haze of the lagoon. The bubbling of the mud pots came clearly. It was like a giant's sardonic chuckling. And on the night breeze, the sinister odor of the great orchids came floating out.

Lucky said, "It's eight twenty."

Singapore asked him if he had checked the engine thoroughly.

"Yeah. Every square inch of her. Senga—Oangi—Pete! Stand by to raise the anchor."

Lucky went below and started the engine. The muttering and blubbering of the exhaust drowned the sound of oars alongside. Sammy did not know that Julie was anywhere in the vicinity until he saw her blond head shining like a halo in the light of a deck lamp.

A moment later Mr. Barling came aboard from another boat.

JULIE was looking about her with shining, excited eyes. She saw men, like the ghosts of pirates, flitting about the deck. They were stripped to the waist. Each had a cutlass in his hand, a revolver or pistol strapped to his waist.

Sammy reached her just as Mr. Barling, puffing and gasping, said, "Julie! This isn't fair! You promised—"

"I promised to sleep aboard the yacht. I'm needed here. If any of these men get hurt, there's no one to nurse them."

Singapore told her curtly to get off the ship. Julie ran forward and hid in the shadows. A rumbling forward indicated

that the anchor was up. A moment later Pete Cringle yelled: "She's up and down."

Senga, having returned aft, advanced the throttle and let in the clutch. The schooner forged ahead, the bows dipped slightly, then the anchor came clear of the bottom, and the chain was windlassed in.

Julie could not be found. Sam barked at Mr. Barling: "You'd better clear out, mister. We're going into the lagoon."

He saw that the patent medicine king was sweating and white. Mr. Barling was scared. Mr. Barling was terrified.

"I'll s-stay!" he chattered.

He was going to be brave, Sam supposed, to impress Julie. But there was no time now for arguments. Oangi and Pete Cringle came aft, took in the accommodation ladder, stowed it below and closed the gap in the rail.

Julie did not reappear until the schooner was well into the inlet. Sam said: "The place for you, baby, is in the crosstree. Scramble up there and keep a lookout."

She picked up a cutlass and climbed to the crosstree. Sammy took a quick turn about the deck, to make sure everything was in readiness. Lucky Jones and Ah Fong were stationed in the bows. Sam gave Mr. Barling a station amidships, and furnished him with cutlass and revolver. Oangi and Pete Cringle were stationed amidships, one on the port, one on the starboard side. Senga was at the wheel. Bryce and Larry were at the taffrail.

Sammy had no station. He would go where he was needed.

He went forward. The schooner was now entering the thin mist. It was cold.

With engine at slow speed, the Blue Goose entered the lagoon.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MONSTER STRIKES.

SINGAPORE SAMMY moved restlessly about the deck. The thin, sinister mist dimmed the stars and reduced the glittering lights of the *Wanderer*, at anchor a mile away, to a blur.

There was something dreamlike, unreal about it all. It was as if the water were giving off the steam, and, with its strange, faintly acrid smell, it was easy to imagine that the beginnings of the world had been like this, with this queer smell and with mist obscuring everything, the water glowing ghostly green with phosphorescence.

All the tales he had heard of the monster were going through his brain now. He tried to picture it as a definite, familiar beast of the sea. But he could not hold any picture. Swarming into his mind came monsters of mythology—sea serpents and creatures slimy and green with fins like the dragons of Chinese legend.

At the crosstree, Julie suddenly cried: "Something in the water dead ahead! Moving this way! Coming to meet us!"

Sam shouted: "Can you make it out?"

Her answer was a hysterical scream: "No! No! It wasn't a shape!"

He had run forward. Standing beside Lucky, he stared into the swirl of the mist, illuminated by the phosphorescence as if by green hell-fire.

Perfectly silhouetted against the bright green of the depths was the clear-cut black body of a small shark. It streaked off to starboard, leaving a trail of black bubbles in the green, and a swirling of the luminous water marking its passage.

Lucky said tensely: "I can't see it!"

And Sam called: "Julie! Do you make it out?"

She cried: "It—it seems to be everywhere—a weird kind of dark—writhing around. But I can't make it out. *We're on it!*"

She stopped. In the emerald green effulgence he could see her slim body clearly. She was holding to the shrouds, leaning out, staring.

The green luminance bathed the masts to their tips and it gave to every face a corpselike glow.

The schooner seemed to stagger slightly.

Lucky roared: "We're aground! Senga! Hard a-starboard!"

And Sammy shouted, "No! Steady on!"

Ah Fong, that placid Chinaman, sudden-

ly uttered a scream. And Sammy simultaneously made a hideous discovery. A slimy ooze was creeping up about the ship, sliding up the sides, sliding between and past and over the steel bayonets!

Worse than any nightmare was this amazing, horrifying invasion.

Slipping, sliding, oozing through the bristling row of bayonets, the slime came aboard. It gleamed and glowed with a pale green fire of its own. It formed tentacles. These instantly became snakes, or eels, without heads, without eyes, without apparent guiding intelligence. The air was filled with that strange acid stench.

Sammy started aft at a run, shouting: "Full speed ahead! Shake this thing off!"

Behind him, Lucky yelled, "Good Lord, what is it?"

All about the ship men were shouting and hacking at the writhing, snake-like tentacles. As Sammy raced aft, he saw a great colorless column rise out of the sea at least twenty feet astern. It resembled a water-spout. It was a pillar of the smoldering green slime! It rose up, headless and horrible, just as the bodies of legendary sea serpents were said to rise.

IT shot up swiftly with splayed ends to attain a height of perhaps twenty feet, then it plunged unerringly at the schooner's stern. It touched the rail with a thud which Sammy could hear above the shouts of the men and Julie's horrified screams. Then it came arching and writhing aboard.

The splayed ends were like the forked tongue of a snake—a snake as large as a mountain.

They struck down at Senga. He darted away from the wheel, but he could not escape. The headless thing reached his head with incredible alacrity. It wound and enfolded his head. The Malay screamed once. Sammy saw his head vanish—mysteriously and horribly crushed and torn into fragments. He saw the Malay's arms torn out and he saw them disintegrate.

He leaped at that twisting column. He slashed at it with his cutlass. He could not sever that terrible snake-like arm. He

had supposed that the stuff was a soft slime. It was not a soft slime. It was as tough as the hide of a shark.

Senga had entirely vanished—swiftly destroyed and mysteriously and dreadfully consumed by this hideous unknown thing.

The arm had coiled about Sammy. He felt the sharp sting, the pressure of it on his back. He slashed and hacked. He did not know that he was cursing and shrieking like a madman. He did not know that all over the ship men were cursing and shrieking like madmen.

It was as if they had sailed from the world of men into a world of nightmare.

Hacking and slashing, Sammy presently severed the head of the tentacle. He hacked at the clinging mass about his chest. The stuff fell away from him to the deck. Instantly it changed shape. It became a pool of slime with live tentacles reaching out frantically in all directions.

And this was the most shocking discovery so far. This awful slime, of tough consistency, had no central brain. Each part of it was its own center of energy and motion.

Desperately, he hacked at the writhing pool of the stuff at his feet. It was reaching out for the main body, or mass. Suddenly, a tentacle joined it. Miraculously, the puddle of slime flowed into the tentacle; instantly became part of it. And this re-formed tentacle struck at him again!

Sammy leaped back and ran to the other side of the ship. Bryce Robbins was hacking away at a mass of tentacles of all sizes, some as thick as a man's wrist, some as thick as a man's thigh, which came flowing aboard and which seemed determined to enfold and destroy him.

Sammy had a momentary fear that none of them would leave the lagoon alive. Every man aboard was fighting for his life. Even Hector Barling, with his white dinner jacket in shreds, was cursing and slashing at the oncoming tentacles.

Stopping at the mainmast shrouds, Sammy received the most sickening shock so far. A tentacle at least five inches in diameter had swarmed up the shrouds to where

Julie clung. She was striking at it with her cutlass. Below her, Larry McGurk was similarly engaged, trying to free her.

SAMMY lent his help. He began chopping at the tentacle as a man would chop at a tree. With a better purchase for his feet than either Julie or the mate had, he severed it swiftly.

The slender column of phosphorescent slime came slithering down. He did not wait for it all to reach the deck, but hacked at it as it came. He severed it again. He kicked the chunks away from each other. He continued to bring the cutlass down as if it were an ax. When he had cut the column into a half dozen lengths, he hacked at them.

Someone shouted hoarsely: "It's going! We're leaving it astern!"

Sammy ran aft. Bryce Robbins had taken the wheel. One of his hands was limp. He was panting and weakly cursing.

Streaming aft, the mass of the thing was dragging through the water. Perhaps a hundred tentacles ran like hawsers from the rail and the hull to the shapeless great mass.

Sammy chopped away at these. Lucky Jones came limping aft to join him. Larry McGurk came aft and aided them. Tentacles when they snapped formed pools on deck and were joined by other pools. Some of these reached the rail and slithered overboard.

The Blue Goose suddenly seemed to leap ahead. This was due to the fact that the last of the clinging tentacles had been chopped through, or had snapped.

They were, for the present at least, free of that hideous, shapeless thing.

The schooner forged through the water. And behind it came the thing, a wallowing, churning, monstrous mass—of what? There existed no question, at least, of its disposition.

It was fury incarnate. It was as if the emotion of wrath had been reduced to this animate and horrible stuff.

The thing followed them, churning the lagoon to foam, shooting out long tentacles

like arms of lightning at the escaping hull. But the Blue Goose, at eleven knots, could not be overtaken.

When Singapore realized this, he laughed and sobbed with relief. He knew that they were dead men who had been miraculously spared.

Senga's last living act had spared them. By giving the engine full throttle, he had defeated the thing.

But now came another danger. The schooner was lost in the mist from the volcanic mudpots. It was impossible, from deck, to see a hundred yards into the mist. The engine speed could not be checked, or they would be overtaken and annihilated by the thing.

Sammy knew that he could fight no more. He was exhausted by his efforts and the nervous strain. Yet the Blue Goose could not be checked, could not be anchored until dawn came and they found the inlet. And they could not safely maneuver about in the lagoon. The thing might corner them in a cove, or they might run aground. In either case, they would be annihilated.

Looking aloft, he saw that Julie was still clinging to the shrouds at the crosstree.

He shouted: "Julie! What can you see from up there? Can you see the inlet?"

She called down, faintly: "No. But it's off over there to starboard. I saw it a moment ago. I can just see the Wanderer's lights."

A thud on deck behind him made him turn about. Bryce had fainted at the wheel.

Sammy took his place while Larry McGurk joined Julie at the crosstree. She was afraid, she said, that she would faint.

But she didn't faint. Only two of that company were unconscious from the horror they had been through. One was Bryce. The other was Hector Barling.

NOT daring to let a sharp, sudden turn reduce the schooner's speed, Sammy put the wheel over easily, a few spokes, and made a long, wide circle. Then, as the mate called down directions, he headed the Blue Goose for the inlet.

The wake was almost a perfect semi-circle. Threshing and churning about in it, lashing the water into liquid green fire with its tentacles and the writhing and lungings of its great central mass, the nameless horror followed.

Bryce Robbins regained consciousness as Sammy piloted the schooner through the inlet. He sat up and saw Lucky, standing near by in the stern, shouting oaths and taunts and emptying the last of three machine guns into the frenzied, threshing mass astern.

The scientist came weakly to his feet and shouted: "Stop that!"

Lucky jeered: "What the hell? If you expect to take that thing back alive, you're nuts!"

Bryce staggered to the taffrail. Panting, he rested his hands on it.

Lucky snarled: "Yah! There's your octopus, smart guy!"

The scientist, gasping and uttering short, sharp groans, grasped the rail and stared at the frantically pursuing mass of radiant green.

Then he glared at Captain Jones.

"You fool!" he panted. "Octopus! Eel! It's greater than anything we imagined! It's stupendous! It's the greatest living wonder of the world!"

"Aw, you're screwy!"

SOMEONE forward announced that the Wanderer had come close inshore, was lying broadside off the mouth of the inlet. Through the thinning mist, Sammy heard the hysterical screams of Mrs. Farrington. Later, Sammy learned that Captain Milikin had heard their shouts and cries and had come close in to render what assistance he could, but had not dared take the yacht into the lagoon.

Sammy estimated his distances. It looked to him as if there was insufficient room for the schooner to squeeze out past the yacht, and he must keep the engine turning over at top speed. He was certain that incredible, tentacled mass, in its malignant fury, would pursue them out into the sea.

But it did not. The tide had turned. There was a sharp green line marking the tiderip. The lagoon water was vividly green, while the ingoing water from the sea was only faintly luminous. At that sharp line, the nameless monster stopped. Not only did it stop, but it began to move away—toward the center of the lagoon.

Bryce shouted, "I knew it! It checks with my theory! That lagoon water has some element in which that thing exists. It cannot exist in ordinary sea water. We must go back! We must prove it!"

"Like hell," Lucky panted.

"Go back!" the scientist insisted. "I'm paying for this show!"

"You're crazy," Singapore said. "We're lucky to be out of there with our skins."

Bryce came toward him, with the glassy, dark eyes, the snow-white skin of a man insane.

"Get away from that wheel!" he shouted. "I'll take her in!"

Lucky sprang at him; struck him twice in the head with fists like hobnail boots. The scientist went down to hands and knees, shaking his head as a punch drunk fighter does in the ring, muttering and almost sobbing, with blood drooling from his lips.

One hand pounced on an automatic pistol lying in the slime on the deck. But before he could aim it, Lucky kicked it out of his hand and Bryce groaned: "Before we're through, I'm going to kill you!"

Sam told Lucky to take the wheel. When Lucky relieved him, Sam helped the scientist to his feet. He said sternly, "Keep your head on, fella. You saw what happened to Senga. Anyhow, why prove your theory all over again?"

He took Bryce down to his cabin and gave him a stiff drink of whisky. Then he went on deck and took inventory. Senga was the only outright casualty. Senga had died instantly and horribly—dubtless as Pegleg Pyke had died and, twenty-six years before him, Gurt Vandernoot.

Julie and Larry McGurk had come down from the crosstree. The lower part of her white sailor's jacket had been torn off. The

tentacle had encircled her waist, had burned her skin on the left hip in a patch as large as her hand.

Bryce had suffered a broken wrist bone. Ah Fong had lost two of the fingers of his left hand, and an ear. Mr. Barling's right arm was broken at the elbow. Oangi's right foot was smashed. Lucky's left ankle was sprained. And Singapore Sammy had a wrenched back. It was beginning to hurt. And it was going to hurt worse.

Strangely—or not so strangely, perhaps—the man who was doomed to die, the man who couldn't be killed, had not been hurt in the least!

CHAPTER XVII.

BRYCE EXPLAINS.

JULIE called to the Wanderer for immediate medical assistance. Mr. Barling's personal physician was too ill to leave his cabin. Dr. Plank was suffering from sun fever, was running a high temperature, and was almost delirious. But he came.

He bound up sprains, sewed up wounds, set broken bones and smeared acid burns with unguents. When he had finished his work, Dr. Plank collapsed. So did Mr. Barling. The doctor and Mr. Barling, the latter suffering from complete exhaustion, were taken aboard the Wanderer.

And the survivors of that fantastic battle with the most dangerous, most horrible creature that ever lived in the sea, huddled in the stern of the schooner, drank whisky in an attempt to restore their shattered nerves, and hysterically discussed what they had individually seen and experienced.

It was like the babbling of men after a night of nightmare. What they had been through was too incredible to be grasped. It would take them days to sort out their experiences and to become normal.

Bryce Robbins was not among them. Immediately after the Blue Goose anchored, he took two stiff drinks of whisky and went to his stateroom with samples of that strange, tough, slimy substance.

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He returned to the afterdeck with the announcement that they had all taken part in one of the most amazing discoveries in the history of science.

Flushed with this new excitement, stuttering in his eagerness, he burst out: "An anomaly! An absolute anomaly!"

And Lucky Jones growled: "What the hell is an anomaly?"

"An exception—a reversal of rules. This is a reversal of all the rules I know. Do you know what that thing is?" he cried. "It's an amoeba! A giant, monstrous amoeba! It revolutionizes all scientific concepts. It is utterly and stupendously amazing! It is a giant mass of protoplasm—a unicellular organism of tremendous size!"

"Keep it simple," Julie advised. "We aren't scientists."

He tried to explain it to them in simple layman's language.

"Men, animals, are composed of billions of cells. An amoeba is a microscopic creature, composed of one cell. An amoeba reproduces by splitting in halves. This thing in the lagoon is an amoeba, but it is a freak. Instead of reproducing, it grew from a speck of life invisible except under a microscope, to this incredible size! Why, I don't know. Perhaps some curious freak of its structure caused it—aided by the strange acid in the lagoon water. In other words, a tiny, single cell has become this hideous and horrible thing—a single cell weighing many tons, possessed of a shrewd and horrible intelligence. It is probably millions of years old. It is the most amazing thing the world has ever known!"

JULIE said, "Why, it's tur-rific! Does this thing look like an amoeba, Bryce? Does it act the same?"

He cried: "It is an amoeba, only with these astounding differences. The amoeba changes form continually. Short processes flow out from the cell body in different directions, and the rest of the protoplasm appears to flow or be pulled along after them. In this way the amoeba is able to progress slowly, by means of these *pseudopodia*, or false feet. They are protruded at any part

of the cell body or on several parts at the same time. I am talking about the microscopic amoeba.

"When this amoeba encounters a vagrant bacterium or other food, it throws out these false feet, on both sides of the object; they flow around it, feet beyond, and thus swallow into the body the wandering bacterium. The food has been *ingested*. Inside the amoeba are products secreted which *digest* it. The parts of the food which are indigestible the amoeba rejects by a reverse process called *egesting*. These three processes are not localized, but take place in any part of the body.

"Now this monster is the same amoeba, only of terrific size, invested with a shrewd and malignant intelligence, and of remarkable speed. It shoots out *pseudopodia*, or tentacles, with almost lightning swiftness. We saw it shoot a tentacle up the shrouds and attempt to seize and ingest Julie. We saw it shoot a tentacle out of the water to a height of twenty-five feet and attack the *serang*. It enclosed his head and shoulders. It ingested his body, tearing it into little fragments, so swiftly that the eye could hardly follow. It was the same with Pegleg.

"Such parts of him as were unfit for food were rejected—his clothing, his teeth, his wooden leg, the buttons of his clothes, his shoes, and so forth.

"We know now how it devoured Pegleg. It sent a tentacle into the room through that three-inch hole. It fairly poured itself through that hole. Once inside that room, it took new forms—shooting out large and small tentacles to overcome and devour Pegleg. Once he was consumed, it simply flowed itself out of that peephole again. No wonder we were amazed and terrified!"

Larry McGurk interrupted: "Is this anything like that fragment of chicken heart which Dr. Carrol is keeping alive in broth in New York, and which would grow to the size of the earth if it weren't kept under control and constantly cut away?"

Bryce said, "There is no similarity. That fragment of chicken's heart consists of millions of cells. This—this thing consists of

but one cell. Yet I must contradict myself. It brings us to the most amazing, most fantastic phase of this creature's structure and being. You will hardly believe me, yet I am sure I am speaking the truth."

He paused. He shook a finger at the semi-circle of upraised faces as if he were addressing students in a classroom.

"I said that this creature, this thing, this monstrous amoeba, consists of one cell. But let me tell you a horrible thing. Floating, or somehow moving about within this strange, tough, slimy mass, are brain cells! They are not the type of cells, or centers, found in the ordinary amoeba. In the ordinary amoeba, the center is called the nucleus. This monster has, strictly speaking, no nucleus.

"But scattered about in the mass of it are free, or independent, brain cells—and *these brain cells are the brain cells of men it has ingested!*"

JULIE protested: "Oh, Bryce! After all, you've told us that it secretes a powerful kind of acid, and that this acid is the stuff with which it digests things so quickly. If it digests skulls and fingernails, how can a brain cell escape?"

Bryce smiled excitedly. "You're getting into deep water. I can explain it, but not simply. In this tough, slimy stuff of which it consists there are small patches or clusters of a neutral kind of stuff—I mean they contain no acid. They have the power to digest nothing. If this creature wished, it could surround any object—your finger, let us say—with this neutral stuff—and your finger would not be digested. That is what happens with occasional brain cells of men it ingests."

Sammy interrupted: "Are you trying to tell us that that—that thing does its thinking with the brain cells of men it has killed and ingested?"

"Exactly!"

"How horrible!" Julie wailed.

"But," Bryce said, "and get this straight: it has no central brain. There are strings, or clusters, of these human

brain cells scattered throughout it like—like raisins in a cake! I don't say that this monster thinks, in the sense with which we use the word.

"But with these brain cells it is enabled shrewdly, even cleverly, to carry out its purpose on earth."

Lucky jeered: "This is gettin' good. Tell us what its purpose is on earth."

"To eat! That's all! It has no other purpose or function. Its sole job on earth is to keep itself supplied with food. Since time began—since its time began—it has had no other job. It is nothing but appetite incarnate. You saw it attack us. You saw it furiously, with a horrible eagerness, thresh and plunge after us in the water. It did not attack us because we are its enemy. It recognizes us only as food—food for an appetite so ravenous, so horrible that you could not possibly imagine hunger like it."

Sam stopped him with: "What do you mean—it recognizes us? Can it see us?"

"Positively not. It has no eyes, no ears, no taste, no smell. It has nothing but supersensitive feeling. To this sensitive surface, all things are alike—sound, waves, light waves and other vibrations. I question whether it could distinguish between heat and cold. Its surface is supersensitive, however, to the nearness of anything fit for food. Once it senses the imminence of food, it attacks. It can attack with horrible wrath, as we saw it attack, or it can attack with diabolical ingenuity, as we know it attacked Pegleg.

"We saw the sureness and fury with which it seized and ingested the shark. We saw the speed and cleverness with which it plucked birds from the air. And that's all it is—stark, insensate, insatiable hunger!"

Julie said: "It's horrible!"

"I doubt if this appetite has ever been appeased. I now believe the stories we have heard of its devouring a whale, of its swarming over and sinking pearling luggers—devouring every man, every edible thing aboard.

"This strange acidity in the lagoon may have developed other freaks of nature, but this monster amoeba would have eaten

them before they could grow. It has always been master of the lagoon."

HE looked at Singapore Sammy and shook his head. "I'm afraid you're going to be disappointed about your pearls, Sam. In its search for food, this monster has, I think you'll find, literally scrubbed the floor of the lagoon clean. Any clam or other bivalve wouldn't have a chance. It would absorb them, digest the meat and reject the shell."

"The other rumors are true," Sam said doggedly. "We've proved they're true. And I heard the pearl rumor on good authority."

"There are no bivalves in this lagoon," Bryce said in his didactic way.

Pete Cringle muttered: "Just the same, we're gonna look."

"If there ain't pearls," Lucky said, "then the whole expedition is a flop. How do you figure we're goin' to capture that thing?"

"We don't have to capture all of it," Bryce answered. "A good-sized chunk will do. You saw it in action. What happened when you chopped off a piece of tentacle? Didn't you see it form a pool on deck? Didn't you see these pools shoot out tentacles until they found and rejoined the main body? But wait! In some cases you didn't see this occur. Why not? I'll tell you! The pools that remained lifeless, that did not shoot out tentacles, that made no attempt at rejoining the main mass were without brain cells!"

"All you want then," Larry said, "is a good-sized chunk full of brain cells."

"Exactly! I'll take it back to New York! I'll give the scientific world a greater surprise than Dr. Carrol's chicken's heart did!"

"But," Julie argued, "you say it will stay alive only in water containing this funny acid."

"That's easy. I'll take the chunk in lagoon water. I'll take a supply of the water along. I'll have it analyzed by the best chemists on earth. We'll find what the acid is. We'll duplicate it!"

"How," Julie asked, "will you get the

chunk you want? We don't dare let it attack us again."

Bryce said optimistically, "We'll find a way."

"We'll rest up a few days," Lucky said. "We won't monkey with that thing again until we're up to it."

The voice of Captain Milikin floated across the water from the Deisel yacht.

"Miss Farrington! Your mother wants to know if you'll come over. She's having hysterics."

Julie answered, "Okay. Send over the tender."

Singapore Sammy started up out of his deck chair. He fell back with a groan, collapsing.

He said, "My back got a bad wrench. Somebody had better help me to my cabin. I can't walk."

Bryce and Larry helped him down the stairs to his cabin. They undressed him and rubbed his back with liniment, but the pain did not ease.

When Larry had gone, Bryce, staring down at the pale, red-headed man in the bunk, said, "Look here, Sam. You're game to go through with this, aren't you?"

"Sure."

"If it's a question of more money—"

"It isn't. I'll go through with it. But we've got to be more careful. I want no more men killed. Senga sailed with me for six years. He was like a brother."

"There'll be no more casualties," Bryce said. "We'll take every precaution."

The two young men gravely shook hands on it. But they were reckoning without the impulses of men driven by shattered nerves and hatred—and the horrible hunger of the most amazing monster the world has ever known.

CHAPTER XVIII.

KING OF THE ISLAND.

ON the following morning, Mr. Barling, Julie and her mother were at breakfast under the canopy on the after-deck when First Mate Bevan McTavish

came aft to inform them that a native canoe was approaching from the island.

They could see it from where they sat. It contained but one man, who sat in the stern, vigorously wielding a crude paddle. They watched his progress with excitement.

"He must have put out from that point of land," McTavish said.

Mr. Barling studied the mysterious stranger through the mate's binoculars and exclaimed: "He's a white man!"

The canoe passed some distance astern of the Blue Goose.

"He's coming here!" Julie said excitedly.

The canoe stopped two hundred yards away. Its occupant removed binoculars from a case slung over his shoulder, placed them to his eyes and studied the Wanderer for some time. Then he returned the glasses to their case and resumed paddling.

When he was a hundred feet away, he shouted, "Wanderer ahoy! Can I come aboard and pay my respects?"

Mr. McTavish, at the head of the accommodation ladder, answered, "Who are you?"

The reply came clear and lusty: "I am Jason Rebb—the king of Little Nicobar!"

"Tell him, by all means, to come aboard," Mr. Barling said.

The king of Little Nicobar paddled alongside the accommodation ladder, made his canoe fast, and came springing up the steps. He was a soiled and sun-blackened specimen of forty-five, with a scraggly black beard, bold brown eyes and a wet red mouth. He wore a stained and battered old sun helmet shaped like a mushroom, so wide that it overlapped his narrow, square shoulders. His blue denim shirt and his white drill pants were in rags. He wore nothing on his feet. His shiny, new-looking binoculars case lent a striking note to that strange, Robinson Crusoe costume.

For a moment, as he came on deck, he stared at the breakfast table, with its snowy linen and sparkling silver. He was grinning. Certainly, there was nothing bashful or repressed about the king of Little Nicobar.

Bold of eye, insolent of smile, he approached. Mr. Barling and Mrs. Farrington he dismissed with a glance. Grinning, he stared at Julie, fresh and cool and lovely in white deck pajamas. His eyes reminded her of bees, so busy they were prowling over her. He stared at her until she dropped her eyes with a feeling of shame.

"I just wanted to welcome you folks to my island," Mr. Rebb said. "I just wanted to tell you if there was anything I could do, don't hesitate to call on me. But from the looks of things, you don't stand in need of much." He let out a roar of laughter.

His accent was Australian. Julie had never seen a man with so much self-assurance. He stood with his naked brown feet planted fully two feet apart, and with his fists planted on his thick waist, staring at her and grinning.

MRS. FARRINGTON was eyeing him with apprehension. But Mr. Barling was apparently delighted with the informality of this dirty, insolent stranger. He said: "We heard something about a white chieftain here, didn't we, Julie?"

Julie nodded.

"The main reason I came out," said the king of Little Nicobar, "was, I thought you might be interested in seein' my tribe. They're puttin' on a show tonight—the big yearly orchid ceremony. They dance and they eat one o' the orchids. You seen 'em yet?" he asked eagerly.

"Not yet," Mr. Barling replied.

"Well, you've missed something, brother! They grow as big as a full grown man, and they smell like nothin' this side o' heaven. The ceremony goes on at ten o'clock tonight, and I'd like to have you come and see it. You'll never see anything like it as long as you live."

Mrs. Farrington shrank from the very glance of this strange, ragged creature, but Julie was fascinated and so was Mr. Barling.

They asked him questions. He answered willingly and with a complete absence of shyness and modesty.

Julie asked him how he had come to be king of Little Nicobar.

"Why," he said, "I used to be a magician. I had a variety act—what you call vaudeville in the States. I was goin' from Java to Malaya in a little hooker. A typhoon turned her inside out, and I got washed ashore here. I'd heard of Little Nicobar—and I was ready. I had some odds and ends in my pockets. When I got ashore and these black fellahs grabbed me, I kept yellin' 'Sambio! Sambio!' Then I gave 'em the treat of their lives. I took glass marbles out of their beards and coins out of their ears till they were rollin' on the beach in hysterics. It's a pipe when you know how."

He was still addressing himself to Julie, still prowling over her with those bee-like eyes.

"What does 'sambio' mean?" Julie asked.

"Peace! Peace! There was a native chieftain. I took beads out of his whiskers and a jackknife out of his hair—and he adopted me! He thought I was the greatest man that ever lived! And when he died, I became the king."

"When was this?" Mr. Barling politely inquired.

"I was shipwrecked here twelve years ago. The old man died two years later."

"Isn't it lonesome?" Mrs. Farrington timidly asked.

"Sometimes. But I like it."

"But—but aren't these people cannibals?"

Mr. Rebb threw back his head and laughed. He said, "Aw, that's old sailors' talk. There's no cannibalism in the South Seas any more. It's been stamped out."

Looking at him steadily, Julie said, "We've heard that these natives send shipwrecked men into the lagoon, to be eaten by that horrible thing."

"Before my time, maybe," said Mr. Rebb. "But not since. I've civilized them. Why! They're just like children!"

He was gazing at the bandage and splints about Mr. Barling's arm. And Mr. Rebb said: "Ho! You were in that fight last

night! I heard you two miles away—hollering and shooting.”

“Have you ever seen that thing?” Julie asked.

“No, thank you, ma’am. It’s somethin’ not to see. There’s an old legend in my tribe that the man who looks on that thing walks in trouble the rest of his days. It’s death and insanity and trouble—pukka trouble—to look on that thing. What happened?”

MR. BARLING told him dramatically of their adventure. And the king of Little Nicobar, with a sad head shake, commented: “You were lucky to come out alive.”

He smoked several of Mr. Barling’s dollar cigars.

And abruptly took his departure, after repeating his invitation.

“It’s somethin’ you’ll never see the likes of as long as you live. No white man in the world but me has ever seen that orchid ceremony. You see that little point of land down there?”

Mr. Barling nodded.

“Meet me there at nine-thirty tonight. You ladies—” he bowed—“will be as safe as if you was at a lawn party in Devon. Have any of you been to Lake Howard, in the swamps of Puma?”

“No,” Mr. Barling said.

“Well, they’re somethin’ like the natives there. You’ll notice their strong Jewish cast. I tell you, folks, I honestly believe this is one o’ the lost tribes o’ Israel.”

Julie said, “Gosh! That’s interesting.”

Even Mrs. Farrington was interested, although she detested men in dirty shirts.

And when the king of Little Nicobar had paddled away in his dugout canoe, she said, “Hector, you—you’re not thinking seriously of going ashore tonight?”

“I’m tempted,” Mr. Barling admitted.

“But he’s such a ruffian!”

Julie left them arguing it, and went over to the Blue Goose. Larry and Oangi were at work dismantling the steel bayonets, which had so thoroughly proved their uselessness last night. Lucky Jones and Pete

Cringle were busy in the stern with the deep-sea diving outfit.

SHE asked them what they were going to do with it, and Lucky said, “Just lookin’ it over, baby.”

“Where’s Sam?”

“Still laid up with that bum back.”

She went below and entered Sam’s stateroom. He was lying in his bunk, his face wan with pain. But he grinned and said, “Slumming again, eh? I hear you had a visitor.”

Julie told him about the amazing Mr. Rebb.

She had not said much when the red-headed man’s eyes narrowed and his mouth hardened.

“I’ve met plenty of his kind,” he said. “They’d steal the pennies off their dead grandmother’s eyelids.”

“I’d like to see that ceremony,” Julie said wistfully.

“Don’t be a little sap!”

She cried: “Who’s being a little sap? It’s a chance in a lifetime!”

“Guys like him eat little girls like you.”

“I’m not afraid of him!”

“No? I’d rather have a date with a bubonic rat!”

For the first time in their friendship they were having harsh words.

Julie said angrily, “I’m sorry about your back. But I think it’s given you a grouch. And I’ll see that ceremony tonight!”

Their nerves were still finely drawn from last night’s terrifying adventure. Julie left in a huff. When the tender had gone, Sam shouted for Larry. And when the mate came in, Sam said, “She’s off her nut. It’s that white chieftain. That slimy rat came out and asked them to go ashore tonight. You go over there and argue with Barling. Tell him I said it was too dangerous.”

Shortly after Larry had gone, Lucky came below. He, too, had a grim, tense look. Larry had told him about Julie’s threat to go ashore tonight.

“I’m gettin’ fed up, Sam. Let’s make a try for them pearls and get to hell out of here.”

Sam said, "Keep your shirt on, fellow. We've got an agreement with Bryce."

"To hell with him! Let him keep his five grand! Pete Cringle is game to make a try for them pearls now."

"How?"

"We're goin' ashore. We're gonna send him down off the beach in that suit."

Sam rose up on one elbow and grimaced with pain. "Nothing stirring. Send that kid down here."

Lucky yelled, "Petel!" and the boy came below, grinning.

"You listen to me, sap," Sammy said. "You're not going down in that suit."

"But it's safe, Mr. Shay."

"Safe! Good Lord! It was safe for Pegleg, and it was safe for Senga, too!"

"But that thing don't go near the beach in the daytime, Mr. Shay. We proved it."

"You saw what it did last night. You saw how fast it is. Stay away from that lagoon!"

"But I just tried the suit and the pump, Mr. Shay. They work fine. And that thing isn't strong enough to smash that suit. It's built for pressure. I been down fifty fathoms in that suit. You know how much pressure there is at fifty fathoms?"

Sammy, still on an elbow, stared at him and he stared at Lucifer Jones.

"What happened last night must have worked a lot of screws loose. You guys are all on edge. You're rarin' for action. Take it easy. Let's study this thing some more."

"If he don't go," Lucky said grimly, "I will."

Sammy tried to sit up, but his back was full of knives. He shouted for Bryce, and when the scientist came down told him to "talk this pair of saps out of pure suicide."

Lucky said, "This guy's got nothin' to say to me. Come on, kid."

SAM fell back with a groan and the three of them went out. He heard

Bryce arguing with them, and he heard Lucky's snarling responses. He heard them loading the small boat, and he heard them start for the beach. He dragged himself

up, almost fainting with pain, and looked out the porthole. Oangi was with them.

If it had not been for their blood-chilling adventure last night, he might not have been so concerned. It was hard to imagine that danger of any kind threatened on a day as beautiful as this. The cloudless sky was innocent, a lovely blue. The sea, gently undulating, was as bright, as blue as a Chantaboun sapphire, sparkling pleasantly under the hot sun. There was no breath of wind.

He saw the three men land on the beach, unload the diving suit and the pump, and carry it over the dune to the lagoon. With an agony of effort, he secured his binoculars and placed them to his eyes.

Pete Cringle was getting into the clumsy steel suit. Now Lucky was bolting down the face-plate. Oangi was working the pump.

Clumsily, the boy in the steel suit walked across the coral ledge beyond the stone cabin and entered the water, with Lucky standing at the edge, paying out hose and line, holding them up so that they would not drag on the knife-edged coral.

The steel suit flashed and glinted hotly in the sunlight. It was a fantastic sight—the shining steel suit, like the armor of a knight, against the white of the beach and the sapphire blue of the water.

He was going down now. Gripping the porthole, with the sweat of pain streaming down his face, Sammy watched. His eyes darted along the wall of jungle. He didn't trust Jason Rebb and his savages. But he trusted the lagoon less.

The steel suit went slowly into the blue water. Pete Cringle was apparently proceeding with caution. He was facing the lagoon as he went into the water, taking slow steps. Now he was waist deep. He went on. Lucky, at the water's edge, paid out the rope and hose slowly, merely keeping the slack out of them.

Now the water was lapping about the face-plate. The great, grotesque helmet went under. Bubbles came surging up.

Watching the lagoon, Sam let out his breath. Oangi was methodically working

the pump. Lucky was holding the hose in one hand, the rope in the other. The diver was going down.

Sam's heart was thumping. Unknown to himself, he was growling curses. Nothing was happening. Nothing was going to happen, but he wished that kid would hurry.

And suddenly he saw the ripple on the calm face of the lagoon. It was moving swiftly from the center toward the shore, toward the stone cabin. An icy pain gripped Sam's heart. He shouted at the top of his lungs: "Get him out! Get him out!"

Bryce Robbins, on the deck above, took up the shout. His voice was a thin scream: "Get him out!"

The ripple was not a tiderip. It was rounder, smoother, and it hadn't a broken side, as tiderips always do.

There was sudden activity on the beach. Lucky was hauling in on the line. He was being dragged in to the edge. He ran across the beach to a coconut palm and took a turn with the line about it. The line tightened. The fronds began to shiver as if a ghostly wind were stirring them. Then the tree bent. Suddenly the line snapped. It slid like a snake into the water. The hose followed it, dragging the pump along. Hose, rope and pump vanished into the lagoon.

Above the frantic hammering of his heart, Sammy heard Lucky's and Oangi's yells. Then he saw a gray glimmer, like a wave of slime, on the beach. Sun glistened on shooting tentacles.

Lucky and Oangi ran back from the beach. With a sick groan, Sammy relinquished the rim of the porthole, dropped his binoculars, and fell back upon his bunk.

CHAPTER XIX.

DEVIL DANCE.

BRYCE came clattering down the stairs. He burst, white-faced and grimacing, into the room. He panted: "It got Pete! It went after Lucky and Oangi! Oh, those damn fools! Those idiots!"

Sam said weakly, "Yeah. Look out and see if they're getting away."

Bryce looked out the porthole. "They're just coming over the dune, running like mad."

"Is that thing after them?"

"No. They're getting into the boat . . . they're shoving out."

Sam groaned, "Oh, that poor damned kid. That poor little sap!"

He could hear the oars splashing. Bryce said: "Lucky's at the oars, rowing like a madman."

The small boat came alongside. Lucky's panting and cursing could be clearly heard. Then his unsteady feet were on the stairs. He came down, white-faced, with horrified eyes, and snatched up the bottle of trade gin on the table beside the bunk. He drank a half pint of it and, panting, faced Sammy.

"It—it got him, Sam!"

"Yeah, I was watching."

"It—it crushed that suit like it was made of wet paper! You—you could see the blood squirtin' out. It squashed that suit flat and it just tore it to pieces! Oh, that poor kid! Then it come up on the beach after us. You never saw anything happen so fast. There was a hundred of them tentacles in the air at once! It almost got Oangi."

"It's a damned shame," Bryce said wrathfully, "it didn't get you, you fool, you damned utter senseless idiot!"

Lucky swayed a little, with fists gripped at his sides. His lower lip jutted, his black brows came down and in and met.

"Yeah," he said. "It don't cost a dime to say that!" He started toward Bryce and Sam barked: "Steady as you go, you ape! You've done enough for one afternoon!"

Lucky turned, like a man in a drunken daze. His eyes were worse than mad. They were stark and horrible and empty.

He suddenly shouted, "I'm gonna kill that thing! I'm gonna take this ship to Singapore and load it to the rail with powder, and I'm gonna blast that son-of-a—"

"Steady!" Sammy stopped him. "We aren't going to kill it. We aren't going to drop our plan for any crazy man. Get in there and take a cold shower. Then get yourself drunk and stop raving."

Lucky lurched out of the room with the bottle in his hand. He ignored only one of Sammy's suggestions: he didn't take a shower.

Larry returned from the Wanderer, wanting to know what had happened at the island.

Sammy said, "Pete went down in that suit to try for the pearls in the cave—and it got him."

"Oh, God. That poor kid."

Sammy repeated portions of Lucky's description of the gruesome and hideous end of "the best deep-sea diver on the Indian Ocean."

And Larry said, "Hell, Sam. You can't blame Lucky. After what happened last night, it's a wonder we all aren't crazy. Over there, everybody on board is on the verge of cracking. It's fierce. The crew is ready to mutiny. That woman is having hysterics. And Julie and Barling insist they're going ashore tonight."

Drearily, Sam said, "Oh, nuts."

"I've been talking to them ever since I went over. There's something gotten into them. That Barling is a little screwy, anyway. But I didn't think Julie'd go haywire on us."

"All women," Sam said, "are screwy. Show them some excitement and they go nuts. Well, what are you going to do about it?"

BRYCE came in. He had overheard enough of the conversation to grasp its essentials.

Sam said, "You'd better both go over there and try to talk sense into them. Tell 'em I said it's risky. Tell 'em these white chieftains are rats—always rats. This Rebb is poison."

Lucky came in, staggering, with the look of a man awash. He said heavily, "You guys can listen to me now. I'm fed up. Do you get it? I'm fed up. I'm through.

I've seen three good men killed by that thing. It's got a jinx on us."

Bryce said coldly: "What happened to Pete Cringle was needless. It was murder. It was—"

"Stow it!" Sam barked. "We're all in this. We're all to blame. We could have stopped Pegleg from going ashore. It was my fault for losing Senga. We were too damned reckless. From now on, we use our heads."

"We're through!" Lucky snarled.

"We're pullin' out!"

"No," Bryce snapped.

"By God, I'll take you to pieces the way that thing took Pete—"

"Pipe down!" Sammy shouted.

Lucky glared blearily at him. "Who's runnin' this show?"

Bryce said icily, "We have an agreement!"

"To hell with the agreement! You agreed in the Mudhole for Sam and me and Larry to have the say. We're sayin' it now. We're through!"

"You're out-voted," Sam quietly answered. "Now, clear out and finish getting yourself plastered. And if you sober up inside of two days, I'll put it into you with a force pump."

Growling, Lucky staggered out. And Sam said, "Bryce, will you go back to the yacht with Larry and argue with Barling?"

"No," the scientist snapped. "They ought to know now how safe this place is. Tell them about Pete, Larry. Let them use their judgment."

Larry went to his room. He shaved, bathed, got into clean whites and returned to the Wanderer. When darkness fell and he had not come back to the schooner, Sammy supposed he was staying over there for dinner. And he presumed that Larry had talked them out of going ashore.

But at a little after nine-thirty he heard the soft exhaust of the tender. And when the soft purring receded until it was finally lost in the far rumble of the barrier reef, he called Bryce below. The scientist said, "They went ashore at the mangrove point."

And Sam growled, "I have a feeling we'll all be dead before this is through."

MR. BARLING, Julie and Larry McGurk had gone ashore. There was no moon, but the stars were so bright that a man's face could be distinguished six or eight feet distant.

Julie wore a sailor's suit and a Sam Browne belt with an automatic pistol in the holster. Mr. Barling carried an automatic rifle, and Larry had a revolver in his hip pocket.

It was Julie who had insisted on going. All day she had been in a reckless mood. She couldn't sit still for five minutes. She could hardly eat. And when Larry told her of Pete Cringle's fate she had not been subdued. She had burst into tears, and when this fit of hysterical sobbing had gone its way, she was more restless than ever. She must, she declared, have action.

A half-dozen times Larry had argued Mr. Barling around to the point where he would have called off tonight's trip ashore, if Julie had only backed down. But Julie would not back down. She wanted action.

When the keel of the tender scraped the sand, Jason Rebb, more mysterious and certainly more sinister by starlight than by sunlight, stepped out onto a patch of sand between the black mangroves.

He greeted them heartily. He said he had been looking forward all day to their visit, but he addressed himself exclusively to Julie. Then he saw that she was armed.

"My dear young lady," Mr. Rebb said, in the accents of alarm, "you don't want to be hurt, do you? And the same goes for you gents, too. My people are just like children, but they know what firearms mean. Firearms mean trouble. I've told them you're coming in a friendly spirit, but if you have firearms, they'll think I lied to them. They'll think you mean to kill them."

Peering into the black wall of jungle, Julie said huskily, "Where are they?"

The king of Little Nicobar chuckled. "Oh, they're scared. Some of 'em ain't more than twenty feet away, peekin' at

you. But most of them are down at the old crater. The ceremony is on. Now, folks, if you'll just leave your guns in the boat and follow me—"

"But why," Mr. Barling plaintively interrupted, "are you carrying that cutlass?"

"I'll show you. It's part of the orchid ceremony."

Larry was averse to leaving their guns behind, but Julie, once again, overrode him. They left their weapons in the tender and followed Mr. Rebb along a jungle trail toward a blood-red glow in the night.

Perhaps an eighth of a mile from the beach they passed the village, now dark. There were thatched huts on bamboo poles, after the Malay fashion, and there was one huge structure of riata, interlaced palm fronds and palm boles. It measured perhaps one hundred feet across the front, and must have been two hundred feet long, by thirty in height, with an arched roof and a floor made of logs from the goru palm.

This, Mr. Rebb explained, was the *dobu*, or communal house, where everyone except the sick lived. It was partitioned into stalls or small rooms.

The embers of cook fires smoldered in front of the *dobu*. They passed this and re-entered the jungle. Sharp yells accompanied by a barbaric thumping made it difficult to talk. The glare became brighter until they could see the fire through thinning trees.

The king of Little Nicobar shouted to his guests, "You better start yellin' *sambio* now! Yell it good and loud and keep on yellin' it."

So Julie, Mr. Barling and Larry started yelling, "*Sambio! Sambio!*" The yelling and the rhythm ahead of them did not diminish, but yells of "*Sambio! Sambio!*" were flung back at them.

MR. REBB and his guests entered the clearing. In the center of a wide, shallow depression which strangely reminded Julie of the craters of the moon, was a fire of blazing faggots. On the far side, half-naked men were beating on

gourds and empty kerosene tins, setting up a barbaric clamor. Black men and women were dancing about the fire, hopping first on one foot, then on the other, and chanting as they hopped.

A small roar greeted Mr. Rebb and his guests. He shouted to Julie, "They're all ready now. They're all set, my dear. You better stop right here. Don't move. If anybody comes close, just yell *sambio*."

Julie was shivering. She felt a little faint. She was more than a little scared. It was her first glimpse of any kind of barbaric ritual. The sharp sounds, the thud of men's feet as they hopped, pounded at her nerves and set them jangling.

Mr. Rebb left her side and walked part of the way around the enclosure to a great black tree from which hung a white and softly gleaming object as large as a man. It might have been, in fact, a man hanging.

It was Julie's first glimpse of the fabulous and monstrous blue orchids of Little Nicobar. She had grown so accustomed to the sickening sweetness of them that she had not particularly observed it tonight until now. And now she realized that the perfume was overpoweringly strong, a scent so powerful that she wanted to fight it off.

Mr. Rebb was climbing upon a structure of some sort beside the gleaming white mass. He began chopping at the top of it with his cutlass. The natives stopped dancing and gathered around him until Mr. Rebb was lost from view.

The great orchid suddenly dropped. There was a milling in the crowd. Six men were carrying the orchid toward Julie, Larry and Mr. Barling.

When they were twenty-five feet away, they dropped it. The savage rhythm started again, and the black men and women again began to dance.

Staring at the monstrous orchid, Julie shuddered. In the wavering firelight, it reminded her of the torso of a woman. It was much longer, but it had that shape. Its pale-blue flesh gleamed pinkly-white in the firelight.

A woman leaped at the great orchid, threw herself across it, and, with her teeth,

tore out great shreds of the sweetly reeking flesh. She tore out handfuls and leaped up, hopping back, in rhythm to the gourds and the kerosene tins. She held her long skinny black arms over her head and squeezed the handfuls of fragrant flesh-like stuff until juice ran down her arms and splattered into her upturned face.

A black man had hurled himself down on the orchid. He, too, bit into the flesh of it, and tore out handfuls of the fibrous pale-blue stuff and leaped up, with hands held stiffly overhead.

Julie grasped Larry's elbow to steady herself. She felt sick. It was hideous. It was obscene.

The natives were yelling more loudly now, and dancing with greater abandon, working themselves to a higher and higher emotional pitch. The din was deafening.

JASON REBB rejoined them. He threw down his cutlass. He grinned and clapped his hands with the beat of the gourds and tins. The firelight in his eyes made them resemble glowing coals. And the fireplay on his impudent profile gave it a saturnine look.

To Julie, he was suddenly an ogre—a human turned monster, offensive, loathsome.

She tried, through her fright, to be polite. She shouted at him, "We must go! We've seen enough! It's been wonderful!"

He caught one of her hands and squeezed and held it. He stared at her face, baring his teeth, and playfully shook his head, not releasing her hand. "You can't go to-night!"

Larry seized his shoulder and spun him roughly about. "Why can't she go to-night?"

The king of Little Nicobar lost his grin. His fiery eyes seemed to glitter. He shook Larry's hand away and snarled, "She is their guest of honor. They would be offended if she left now."

Larry gave him another push and shouted: "Let go her hand! We're going!"

"You're going to hell!" shouted Mr.

Rebb. "But she's staying here! She's staying with me! From now on! Get it?" And to Julie, with that satanic grin, "We need a queen. I need a queen."

But he had released Julie's hand. She cried: "Larry! Hector! What are we going to do?"

Mr. Barling was too shocked, too horrified, to answer. Mr. Rebb made another lunge at Julie. Larry met him with a shoulder and butted him back. All day he had anticipated something of this sort, and yet he had made no plans for meeting it. What could three unarmed people do in the midst of savages famed for their cruelty, ruled by a white rascal?

Some of the black men, perhaps a dozen, had stopped jumping about the fire and were now gathering in a semi-circle between Jason Rebb and the dancing fire, as if they

were acting on a signal from him. Many of them carried spears — black-handled weapons with points elaborately and cruelly barked with native thorns and the spines of fish. They would rend and rip and tear flesh in a hideous manner.

The king of Little Nicobar yelled, "Try it! Try and get away!"

Julie had gone behind Larry. She was standing as close to him as she could, clasping him about the chest. He could feel the tremors running through her, he could hear the chattering of her teeth.

Behind her, Mr. Barling panted: "Do something, McGurk! For God's sake get us out of this!"

Jason Rebb heard part of it. "Yah!" he jeered. "Do something, McGurk! One move—and you get a spear in your belly! Go on, McGurk! Do something!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

A Man For Sale

ON Monday, November 14, 1842, the only slave sale in Chicago history occurred. It involved Edwin Heathcock, colored, who had enraged his employer, a farmer living on the north branch of the Chicago River. In retaliation for certain offensive remarks, the farmer had Heathcock committed to jail on the grounds of being in Illinois without free papers.

Lowe, then sheriff, advertised during six weeks in the *Chicago Democrat*: A man for sale. On the Saturday night preceding November 14, Eastman, an abolitionist, and Calvin De Wolf, then a young lawyer, printed a number of handbills headed: "A Man For Sale."

Monday morning a crowd gathered that blocked the corner of La Salle and Randolph Streets, and up to the log jail. Lowe brought the man out and addressed the crowd:

"Here is an able bodied man; I am required to sell him for a term of service, for the best price I can get for him to pay jail fees. How much am I offered?"

The people looked on, glum and scowling, in expressive silence. Finally the threat of putting the man back in the miserable jail brought an offer.

"I bid twenty-five cents." This was the voice of Mahlon D. Ogden. Appeals were made for an increase of the bid. Then the man was struck off to Ogden. He handed the sheriff a silver quarter in the presence of the crowd, who gave a liberal cheer. He then called the man to him and said:

"Edwin, I have bought you; I have given a quarter for you; you are my man—my slave! Now, go where you please."

—John E. Reilly.