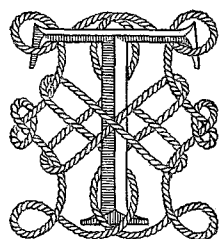


THE VOODOO-WOMAN

BY
MARY S. WATTS

AUTHOR OF "THE GATE OF THE SEVEN HUNDRED-
VIRGINS," "THE GREAT NORTH ROAD," ETC.



EN or twelve years ago I spent a summer on an island of the Maine coast which I shall here call Northport. It was an isolated place; I must reach it from the mainland by cat-boat, with my trunk nicely adjusted in the midst—a fashion of travel that seemed to me then in the last degree adventurous. One can hardly overstate the wonder and delight with which a landward-dwelling person makes the acquaintance of the sea. I passed whole days exploring my island, in a continual foolish beatific surprise at this altered face of Nature,—the vast, dominant water, the tides coming and going with an ordered mystery. There was a sharp fragrance in the Northern woods; I liked the clean, weedless forest-floor and the austere pines marching on either hand. It was not a luxuriant soil,—Northport is as near solid rock, I think, as any land can be,—yet it was covered with a lean and sober vegetation. Blueberries grew in the uplands, and I sometimes made a show of picking them, carrying a tin pail with a book in the bottom of it; but the bushes can have suffered little by me, for I believe a more deliberate and conscienceless idler never existed.

These pursuits must have made me pretty unsociable, for I do not remember exchanging a word with any one, except my hosts at the farm-house where I lodged, until the day, a fortnight or so after my arrival, when I fell in with Cap'n Jonathan Starr. I found him comfortably disposed upon a natural bench of stone commanding a wide view from the summit of one of Northport's many headlands; this and its twin slanted to the sea by long and noble reaches, to inclose a bay fit for the galleys of Aeneas; and the grave trees collected on its shore might very well figure the sacred grove, dark with an awful shadow. There was a sky of steadfast blue; white clouds, white sails, went to and fro along the horizon; the picture did not lack a classic outline—always excepting, that is, the singularly ill-assorted detail of Cap'n Jonathan Starr caulously chewing tobacco in the foreground. The old man had been convoyed thither in my sight by a little brisk, acid granddaughter; I had heard her shrilling orders at him as I drew near.

"Now, Gran'pa, here's your tobacco. Here's your cane. Here's your cushion. Now I'm going to pick berries; and don't you stir till I come back, hear?"

After which she whisked out a pan from

somewhere, fell on her knees beside the nearest bush, and in a twinkling the berries were bounding against the tin.

"Is this 'Christmas Cove?' I asked of this queer travesty of Little Nell.

She tilted her chin, appraised me in one brief glance, and returned to her task, flinging a "yes" at me over her shoulder. Her grandfather was more lenient.

"Fine day, ain't it?" he said amiably, and made room for me beside him on the bench. He was a small, stoop-shouldered mariner, with mild blue eyes and that arrangement of beard behind, not on, the chin that makes one think of a halo in the wrong place. He was not garrulous, but showed a pleasant willingness to talk as soon as the berry-picker, of whom he plainly stood in some awe, had, going from bush to bush, picked herself out of sight.

"Literary, ain't ye?" he asked, after we had exchanged names, glancing at the book in my lap. "I read a good deal myself, off and on. It's about all I'm good for, now." His eyes wandered to the sea with a wistfulness I found rather touching.

"You've always been a sailor, Cap'n Starr?"

"Man and boy, sixty-odd years." He shifted his quid and spat thoughtfully. "But I'm done now. I've made my last v'y'ge—till I clear for up yonder, that is,—maybe I ought to say *down* yonder. Person kind of sails under sealed orders, that trip."

"You must have started out young."

"Rising thirteen, I was. Seems like yesterday sometimes, and then again like ever such a long time. I'm fond of sitting here and watching the boats go out, and thinking of old days. Lord! what a man sees going up and down the almighty waters for sixty years!" He shook his head. "'He bring-eth 'em to their desired haven,'" he quoted, with a perfect unabashed reverence. Doubtless he had fared hard on many a rigorous cruise, and fronted death a thousand times; doubtless, too, he had spent his pay in devious ways, and lived the life of Jack ashore—but I think I have seldom seen old age wear a face at once so brave and so simple.

"How did you happen to go to sea, Cap'n Starr?"

"Why, I ran away, like more than one boy before and since," he answered. "And a strange trip it was, too. You'd have thought I'd not care to go again. But I did. That's the way with the sea; it takes hold of you, and it won't let go. I tried school-teaching once—but I couldn't stick to it. Not but what I was a pretty good teacher;

you wouldn't think it to hear me now, but I was."

I told him I had noticed he spoke like an educated man; an awkward speech, but I believe it gratified him.

"Travel's a good schoolmaster," said he. "I've been lots of places."

"Yes? Tell me about your first voyage, Cap'n Starr; you said it was a queer one."

"There ain't much to tell," he said, with a careful pretense of disinclination to talk, although I could see the question pleased him mightily. "I stowed away on the bark *Laughing Sallie*, out o' here for the Wind'ard Isles, Cap'n Jed Slocum. They found me along the second day, when I couldn't hold out any longer. I'll bet I was the sickest boy this side the Horn—and Slocum the maddest man. He gen'ally knew pretty well what he wanted, and if there was one thing on earth he *didn't* want, it was me. However, there I was, and there I had to stay. He hadn't any notion of putting in somewhere and landing me—couldn't take all that trouble for a boy, you know. He said he guessed my folks would make it lively for me when I got home, but, in case they didn't, he'd take care of *his* end of the job, anyhow. And he did. He was a hard man.

"Slocum owned the *Laughing Sallie*, and worked her himself, trading to the islands. Lots of men did that in those days. He'd take down a cargo of rosin, pitch, salt fish, turpentine, hides, tallow,—anything and everything that they didn't grow down there,—and come back loaded up with sugar and coffee and spices, and sometimes mahogany logs, but not often, because the bark wasn't built to carry lumber. The *Laughing Sallie* was named after Slocum's wife, they said. If he was the same kind of man ashore that he was afloat, I guess she didn't have much to laugh at. A hard man he was, Jed Slocum, and he came to a hard end.

"He always had trouble shipping a crew, partly, of course, because his vessel had the name of being a regular floating he—excuse me, ma'am—for hard work, hard words, and poor feed; but largely because, though he was accounted a good seaman, he was so tarnation reckless. He'd crowd on in the face of a gale fit to blow the teeth down your throat; he was always in a blind, stampeding fury to get where he was going. He wouldn't be beat by wind nor weather; say 'shorten sail' to him and get a black eye. The *Laughing Sallie* never was known to come home with all hands; and right at the beginning of this very cruise, off Hatteras in

a storm, one of the starboard watch went overboard. I remember his name was Charlie Mason, and he'd lost two fingers of his left hand, cut off by pirates in the China Seas, he said. But he was spry aloft as any ten-fingered man you ever saw. As if that wasn't enough, within a day's sail of the Bahamas we were made to lay to, with a shot across our bows, by the British line-frigate *Scorpion*, forty-eight guns. She sent a lieutenant and some marines aboard us and took off three men. Stood us down they were British deserters — and I do believe one of 'em was; but, of the others, one was a Glo'ster man that had been with Slocum two cruises, and the other Ned Morris, that we all knew and had grown up with right here around Northport and Boothbay. The English used to do that way in the old days before the war, you know. Losing four men left us so short-handed we were all nearly worked to death — Slocum, too; I'll give him his due, he pitched in with the rest. It didn't improve his temper any. Fortunately, the weather held on good, or I don't know where we'd have been. About three days later we spoke the brig *Dolly Madison*, four weeks out from New Bedford for Valparaiso, with a cargo of rum. Slocum knew her skipper, and had a boat lowered to make him a call and see if he couldn't borrow a hand. But it turned out the *Dolly Madison* wasn't any better off than ourselves, for the *Scorpion* had held her up, too; I think they had lost two men. The *Madison's* captain advised Slocum to put into Port Barrancos, because it was plain the bark couldn't be handled in comfort, the fix we were in. 'And,' says he, 'there's always scores and scores of seamen hanging round Barrancos looking for berths. You can't do better.' 'I can't do worse,' says Slocum, grumbling, but he gave in after a while, when the *Madison's* skipper (his name, I think, was McDermott, or maybe McDonough) said that was what *he* meant to do. They were in the same box together, and misery loves company.

"You see, Port Barrancos was what they call nowadays 'wide open.' There was nothing much to the island except the grand, big harbor; it was the largest of a little group, some of 'em just points of rock sticking up out of the water, with a bunch of palm-trees on top, that sailors used to call the Hen-and-Chickens — on the charts they put it down Barrancos Cays. It was a place of call for ships from all over the world — not the little outlying islands, where only a few fishermen and such lived, although I've touched there to get fresh fruit and turtle-eggs, but Port

Barrancos itself. It belonged to Spain then, and there was a big town, all low houses, white and many-colored, and a fortress — built, I guess, in Diego Columbus' time — at the entrance to the harbor; and what with the sugar trade, and slaves, and ships calling in from every quarter of the globe, I tell you, Port Barrancos was a stirring place in those days. I'll bet it had more liquor-shops and dance-halls and pawnbrokers and gambling-dives to the square yard than any other town of equal size on the face of the earth — every one of 'em jammed to the doors with sailormen, mostly drunk and raising hell — excuse me, ma'am. There was all the tongues of the Tower o' Babel to be heard there, and you might take your choice of complexions, ranging from coal-black to pink-and-white with blue eyes. The natives are kind of coffee-colored, with straight hair — not like negroes, you know. As for law and order, why, the fellow with the most money got it, and the rest had to shift for themselves, every man for his own hand, and Somebody take the hindmost!

"Take it altogether, you can see why a sober, steady man like Slocum wasn't very keen to turn what men he had loose in Port Barrancos; but, in the pinch, he couldn't help himself. We made the island next day, and came to anchor just inside the lower tip of the crescent (that's the shape of the bay), under the guns of the Morro. The *Dolly Madison* was berthed a little farther along, as I remember, near a dock where there was a big sugar warehouse. Of course, I was about crazy to go ashore, and they let me without any fuss, although all but the two men that rowed Slocum's gig were expressly forbid to stir off the vessel. Nobody was caring much about me, you know; boys are cheap and plentiful, and I hadn't been wanted, in the first place.

"I've been in Port Barrancos since many times, but it never looked so wonderful and interesting to me again after that first day. I dawdled along the streets, staring and listening like an idiot, I guess, until I came to the market-house. It was built over a whole square, with two streets through, crossing in the middle. The people had dozens of little hole-in-the-wall stalls where they sold their stuff, dickering and screeching — you never heard the beat of it! By and by I came to the fruit-stands, and then my mouth surely did begin to water. There were pineapples and oranges, and hunks of sugar-cane, and round, potato-looking things they call sapodillas, which I afterwards found out ain't all they're cracked up to be — but it all looked good to

me then. I hadn't any money, so I just must take it out in looking. After a while I noticed a young colored woman in one of the booths eying me pretty hard, and then making believe to be busy with her fruit, and then sizing me up again. She saw I had caught her at it, and sung out: 'Leetle boy-ee! Come-a here, leetle boy-ee!'

"I went up, and she reached around behind her and brought out a basket of figs and held it toward me.

"'You lak' feeg, eh?' says she, talking like that.

"Boylike, I wasn't going to acknowledge I hadn't any money, so I said, 'Thank ye, ma'am, I never eat 'em,' aching for a taste all the while.

"She began to laugh. 'You got no money, eh? You tak' heem, so,' and she shoved the basket into my hands.

"I wondered how on earth she knew I hadn't, and what she meant by making me a present of the fruit. But in a minute she said, 'You nice-a leetle boy-ee—pretty leetle boy-ee. I lak' you. You stop here?' and handed out a stool.

"Now, I wasn't particular about being called a 'nice-a leetle boy-ee'—that kind of talk'most always makes a boy uncomfortable,—but I thought she meant well in her outlandish fashion, so I answered, 'Much obliged, ma'am,' and sat down, and she showed me how to peel the figs, which, of course, I didn't know anything about. I took a good look at her. She was very tall and slim, quick as a fish in her movements, and had on a neat blue cotton dress, and a turban of pale-yellow muslin wound about her head, and long gold ear-rings. She was a real pretty, light, tawny shade, and was always nodding and smiling with her big black eyes, and showing her white, shiny, pointed teeth like a cat's. But what gave me a sort of turn was when all at once she pulled out her left arm from under the folds of her skirt, where she had kept it all this time, doing everything skilfully with her right, and I saw she hadn't any hand on it! She must have been born that way, for there was no mark of its being cut off; her arm was round and smooth over the end like a broom-handle, with just one or two little folds or pleats in the skin.

"You wouldn't think it, but, ma'am, the thing had a kind of creepiness about it; I hated to look at it, but couldn't help myself, somehow. She saw me and didn't seem to mind; she got out a piece of thin paper and some tobacco, and rolled a cigarette and began to smoke, looking sideways at me and

laughing. Then she leaned over and blew a cloud of the warm smoke around my head, and says she: 'You come-a with me, leetle boy-ee, eh?'

"I tried to answer and tell her I must go back to the ship, but I only mumbled something; I felt dazed and wanted to lie down somewhere and go to sleep. But when presently she got up and said in her cool, soft voice, 'You follow, leetle boy-ee,' I got up, too, and trailed after her, as you do in dreams.

"I didn't know how far we walked or which way, but, in a little, we got down to the waterside and found a boat, and got in, nobody paying any attention to us. She made me sit in the bow, and rowed herself, handily as a man, with her stump-wrist stuck through a thong of leather on one of the oars—she went fast, too. After a while she began to sing in time to her stroke, and then either I fell asleep or lost consciousness some other way, for the next thing I knew, the keel of the boat was bumping on shingle, and she was getting out with the painter in her hand and pulling us up on a beach. I sat up and rubbed my eyes. We were in a kind of harbor, where a little river came down, widening to the sea; in places the palms and green tropic stuff grew almost into the water; the tide was coming in; there was a great long arm of land stretching out that made what you might call a natural breakwater, and I could hear the surf humming outside of it, and, where it narrowed and flattened, see the clouds of spray roll up, and hang, and fall. There were two big palms, as like as twins, standing at the very point, shaking about in the wind.

"That was the noisiest place to be so lonesome I ever saw. The breakers thumped outside the bar; the huge wind whistled among the trees; all kinds of birds squawked and chattered overhead in the jungle, and underfoot it seemed to be alive with creeping and rustling things.

"'Where is this?' says I, staring around and beginning to be uneasy. 'I want to go back to the ship.'

"'Dis nice-a place,' said the woman, in her gibberish. 'You come-a see my house. Look, Barrancos, look!' She pointed, and, sure enough, a long way off, I could just make out a little dim spot on the sky-line that might have been Port Barrancos or Port Anything-you-please, for all I could tell.

"'I want to go back,' says I, cruelly scared, but fighting it down the best I could. There was something in that clamorous, empty shore, the sea shouting and flinging on the bar, not another human being in sight (not

even a sail) except the tall yellow woman — there was something in it, I say, that chilled the heart. 'Won't you please take me back, ma'am?' says I.

"'You go back, one leetle time,' says she; 'follow now.' She started off into the woods, and I behind her like a dog.

"If it was noisy on the beach, it was ten times worse inland. There was some kind of bird that shrieked and laughed like a madman in the trees. I saw I couldn't tell you how many big, fat snakes curled up on logs, and one hanging down from a tree like a curtain-tassel, with a flat head shaped like a spade. They never offered to move — just watched us with their dull, fixed eyes. The ground was a bog of tepid black slime; there were long vines that caught you around the neck and ankles; and it was dark and stunk foully, like a sick man's breath.

"All at once we came to a clearing where there was a shack such as the natives put up, thatched with banana-leaves, without any windows, and a blanket hanging in front of a hole in one side for a door. Outside there was a kettle swung on three sticks over a dead fire. The woman turned around and says, 'You mak' fire now,' and went inside the hut and pulled the blanket to. So I got to work with a pile of leaves and sticks, and pretty soon had a good blaze going. Once I peeped into the pot; it was about half full of stuff like grayish jelly — it quivered when I joggled it. All this while — only a few minutes — I could hear the woman gabbling fast in a low voice; once or twice I thought I heard some one else speak, but that may have been fancy. Anyway, she came out at last and took me by the hand and pulled me inside. There wasn't anything there; only the four bare walls and dirt floor, and in one corner a live black chicken that sat without moving. 'You look here,' said the woman, and picked up a dirty rag off the floor. There was a hole about two feet square and I don't know how deep, full to the brim of gold and silver coins; I never saw so much money together before nor since — and the queer thing is, I was too much of a boy and too frightened to care anything about it!

"My, that's real pretty, ma'am,' I said at last, seeing she expected me to say something.

"'You no want some, leetle boy-ee? You tak' some, eh?'

"'Thank ye kindly, ma'am, I don't care for any,' says I — and I meant it. I'd always been brought up to think it was kind of low to take money you hadn't earned from any one.

"'Oh, yes; you tak' some,' she said eagerly.

And with that she thrust her stump in among the coins up to the elbow and churned them all about, then grabbed out a big handful. 'You tak' heem,' she said, and stuffed them into my pockets in spite of me. 'Now, not say no more; hush now.' She laid her finger on her lip, took the black cock under her arm, and went outside, where the fire was burning strong and the kettle bubbling. She pulled me over to it, and suddenly, before my eyes, plumped the chicken, live as it was, into the boiling mess. It came once to the top, with a horrid croak; and, before I could gather myself together, she had me by the wrist, holding it over the pot and sawing at it with a knife. The blood spurted and ran down. I cried out — I struggled like a rat — and saw a big black man standing grinning with little red eyes the other side of the fire!

"And that's the last I knew, ma'am. The whole thing wheeled around me into blackness, in a muck of fire and blood, and my own screams ringing in my ears!

"When I came to, I was lying across a couple of barrels in the broiling sun on the water-front at Port Barrancos. I sat up. I felt a little weak and giddy, but otherwise as good as ever. At first I was in a kind of maze, not remembering where I was nor what had happened; and when, little by little, it all came back to me, I thought I'd been having a bad dream. Then, as I stretched and gaped, I felt a hot twinge of pain in my wrist, and, looking, saw it was bound up in a bit of rag. That brought me up all standing. I took the rag off, and there was the cut, but not a real bad one. I studied a good while over it, gave it up at last, started along the quay, and, by good luck, fell in with a man peddling oranges out of a boat, and persuaded him to set me across to the *Laughing Sallie*. As we came near, one of the men was leaning over the side, so I hailed him. He stared at me for a minute without answering; then, 'Why, Johnny,' says he, 'where you been all day and all night? We made sure you were drowned or knocked on the head.'

"'I ain't been away all day and night,' says I. 'I don't know what you're talking about.' Then the orange-man struck in and said he wanted something for putting me over; so the seaman (his name was Matthew Friend), knowing I never had any money, good-naturedly went down into his pocket and gave him some small silver. 'I wouldn't wonder if you'd had a touch o' sun, my lad,' says he, eying me; 'you look kind of peaked. Where'd you go yesterday?'

"Nowhere, I tell you," says I, puzzled. "How could I? I went ashore this morning."

"There was an old sailor aboard, named Cobb, that came up and looked me over. 'This is Wednesday, Johnny,' said he; 'what day was it you left the ship?'"

"It was Tuesday morning! Where had I been all that time? I, for one, never knew."

"Take him below, Matt," says old Cobb, seeing how frightened and bewildered I was; 'no need for skipper to see him yet awhile.' So Friend heaved me up in his arms, and, lo and behold, a handful of gold and silver dropped out of my jacket pocket and rolled all about the decks!

"The men were hardly more thunderstruck than I. I had forgotten all that part of my adventure. The mate and another seaman came running at the sound, and everybody stood staring. No one moved to touch it for a minute, they were all so surprised. Then Matthew Friend set me down roughly, and says he, 'Why, ye limb, did you have all that and let me pay your boat-hire? I'll ——'"

"Hold on, hold on, Matt," says the mate, who was a hatchet-faced, keen sort of fellow. 'Maybe it ain't good.'

"Old Cobb stooped down and picked up a piece, bit it pretty hard, and rang it on the deck. 'That's gold, for sure, Mr. Cannon,' said he. 'I guess it's Spanish money; I never saw any like it before.'

"It's what they call a piece-of-eight," said Mr. Cannon, squinting his eyes to examine it. 'It's dated 1612 — they don't coin 'em any more.' Then he wheeled round on me. 'Where'd you get this? Did you steal it? Where've you been?'"

"Speak up and tell the truth, Johnny," said another man.

"Or I'll take a rope to you," added Friend, by way of encouragement.

"So I told them the whole story then and there, not being at all unwilling, but certain that no one would believe me."

"At first no one did. They asked all manner of questions, at which the mate, especially, was very artful, to trap me; but when I stuck to the same tale, without altering it or contradicting myself, first one and then another began to trust me — the more as it wasn't to be believed that I would cut my own wrist, or that I could invent such a yarn, anyhow. And one thing fell out very strangely to confirm me, as it were. When I described the place where the woman had taken me, one of the seamen cried out that he knew the spot, and that it was on an island called Dos Hermanos (on account of the twin palms), ten or twelve miles south-

east by south from Barrancos, and that he had landed there to take turtles. 'I could find my way to it blindfold,' said he. 'They do say the bucaniers used that harbor in old days to dock and repair their ships.'

"To be sure," said Mr. Cannon; 'that would account for Johnny's treasure — likely they buried it there. They were great hands to bury money.'

"Old Cobb shook his head. 'How d'ye account for the nigger wench?' said he. 'I'll tell you what I b'lieve. Whether that treasure was stowed away by pirates or not, she come at it by foul means, and you may lay to it, she's a voodoo.'

"What's that?" said I, who didn't know a voodoo from a lobster-pot.

"Why, a witch, sonny. They're always looking out for children, and when they catch 'em, nobody ever hears of 'em again. They want 'em to kill and eat, or else to use in their spells somehow — maybe to raise the devil. I guess that's what she wanted of you, only her magic didn't work for once.'

"Don't see why," said Friend, surveying me. 'Johnny ain't no angel.'

"Yes; but he didn't want to take her money, d'ye see? Maybe that kept her charms from working.'

"But, look here, didn't the boy say he saw a black man? Maybe that *was* the devil, shipmates.'

"More like some big buck nigger come home to dinner," said Mr. Cannon, and they all laughed. Nevertheless I could see my story had made a kind of stir in the men's minds. I was about the most important person in the ship that day; every man, at one time or another, took me aside and made me tell him about it all over again, and asked to see the money, and offered to take care of it for me. Next to me in popularity was Abel Harper, the man that knew where the island was. And as soon as Slocum returned, which he did at noon, in a biting bad temper, not having been able to sign on anybody, they had me aft into the cabin.

"My, my, money's a queer thing! Here it had gone and turned a lot of as honest sailormen as ever were seen into no better than a ship-load of pirates. However the mulatto woman had come by her holeful of treasure in the beginning, it was hers now — but nobody gave that a second thought. From that minute no man trusted his fellow or spoke his thought outright — and the secret seemed to level away all distinctions between captain and crew. Yes, ma'am, there wasn't much discipline left on board the *Laughing*

Sallie when the treasure-hunting fever took 'em all. I called it a secret, because when the skipper of the *Dolly Madison* came aboard for a sociable time that evening, word was passed for'ard that nothing was to be said about me or my adventure. But a seaman don't naturally hold in a secret any more than a sieve does water, and I am certain some of ours must have let something leak out, by what happened afterwards. Of course, I knew that something was in the wind, but not just what it was until we stood out of Barrancos harbor the next morning at the turn of the tide. There wasn't any grumbling about being short-handed, either, you may be sure — the shorter the better, everybody thought, and worked with a will. We fetched the island about midday, and one of the men gave me a hand up into the rigging to take a look at it.

"Is that the place, Johnny?" he asked.

"At first I didn't recognize it, but by and by, when we opened the bay and saw the two palms standing where the spray blew over them, I knew it, and dropped down on the deck, shaking. You see, I thought maybe they'd want me to go ashore and guide 'em to the shack. And, let alone the fact that I had been too scared and stupefied to take any marks of the road to it, the mere notion of going back there put me in a cold sweat. But, as it turned out, nothing was further from their minds. They wanted no boys along. Abel Harper said the island was small, and that you could go all over it in an hour, although he himself had never been away from the shore. Slocum anchored inside the bar, feeling his way with the line, at a place Harper pointed out, about three hundred yards from the river's mouth. Then, while the men were clearing away our long-boat, what does he do but call me to help him lug out a lot of muskets, cutlasses, and ammunition from the lazaret — pretty nearly all vessels carried arms of some kind in those days.

"Now, ain't money a queer thing? As if any amount of powder and shot could do any damage to devils and witches! However, the skipper called all hands aft, dealt out the weapons, and then made a short speech, winding up with: 'My lads, for my part, I don't take any stock in devils, or voodooos either, and would be willing to meet the whole bilin' of 'em just as I am. But in case we find other company here, which I think very likely, I propose to make it as pleasant for them as they will for us. What I want to say, in particular, is this: one man must stay here to watch the ship, and you may

decide that by lot amongst yourselves, the man that stays getting an equal share with the rest. I can't say fairer than that.'

"Well, there was a good deal of growling over this among the four seamen — for the skipper and mate were out of the drawing, and nobody disputed for a moment that *they* were to go. But at last they all wrote their names on bits of paper and made me draw one out of a hat with my eyes shut. The lot fell to Matthew Friend; he took it good-natured enough, only, as they shoved off, he called out, 'It's share and share alike, ain't it, Cap'n, without any difference 'twixt officers and men?' Slocum grunted out that we'd see about that, which was all the satisfaction Friend got out of him. We watched 'em land and haul the boat up above high tide; then, after some looking around and arguing, they struck a path into the jungle, and in a little were out of sight. They went in single file, Harper leading, then the skipper, then Cobb, then a young seaman whose name I don't remember on account of our always calling him 'Harelip' (he had one), and Mr. Cannon bringing up the rear with a cutlass in his hand. After they had disappeared, Friend says to me coolly: 'Well, Johnny, I guess I'll be leaving you directly.'

"'Why,' says I, 'what are you going to do? You ain't going, too?'

"'Ain't I, though?' says Matthew Friend. 'Wait and see. I ain't any notion of staying here and twiddling my thumbs. The ship's as safe as Noah's Ark, and, even if she wasn't, what could one man do? I'm going to swim ashore, and you can come, too, if you like.'

"'It's mutiny,' says I.

"'Mutiny be — somethinged!' said he. 'If you come to that, what are we doing here, anyhow? Whose money is that, hey? 'Tain't ours. And what d'ye call taking money that ain't yours? All I'm sure of is, I'm going to have my share.'

"This was the only time I ever heard one of them doubtful about the rights of the case. Friend took off his coat and shirt and made a bundle of them with a pistol wrapped up in the middle, and tied it on top of his head to keep it dry; then he took his knife between his teeth, and dropped over the side. He swam, I should judge, two thirds of the way, and then, all at once, while I was hanging over the rail, sniffing, for I was frightened and lonesome — on a sudden, I say, he gave a short cry, threw his hands up, struggled a minute, and went under!

"I was nigh about crazy. I remember I ran up and down screaming and beating my

hands together. Then I thought maybe he was fooling, and shouted to him to drop it. Then I sat down and watched the spot until my eyes all but dropped out of my head. He never came up, so I knew he was gone for good — poor Matt Friend, that was always so jolly and kind and didn't knock me around as much as the rest. I began to cry and act wild again out of sheer terror and helplessness. I never knew whether he had cramps or whether a shark took him — he would have acted the same in either case. At last I got kind of exhausted, and crawled into the shade of the deck-house and went to sleep.

"I waked up, not knowing what time of day it was, and cried some more. I watched the beach for a long while, but nothing was to be seen except some big turtles; then I felt hungry and went down and got a biscuit. There was nobody to forbid me, so I wandered all over the ship. In the captain's cabin I found the log, and read it up, just out of boy's curiosity, you know. Slocum was a methodical man; the last entry was that very morning. "April 1st: Latitude so-and-so — Longitude so-and-so. When —" There it ended in a great blot of black stain. It was blood, and I remembered he had gashed his thumb cutting a pen, and was binding it up in a rag when he came on deck to look at the island. All Fools' Day — queer, when you come to think it over.

"As I was looking at the book, I thought I heard a step on deck, and flew out of there in a panic, though I'd have almost been willing to take a flogging to see them come back. But it wasn't anybody. I found a telescope in the mate's berth, and played with that awhile, watching the shore; then I got hungry again, and ate some more biscuit and some cheese and fruit I found in the galley. It was while I was doing this I heard two pistol- or gun-shots, far away but perfectly distinct, and ran to look. There was nothing in sight, but, after a great while, I heard three more, and none after that, though I watched and listened until it was too dark and coming on to blow too hard for me to see or hear anything. I was afraid to go below, because I'd got a horrid kind of feeling that some one was peeking at me through the skylights. It was cooking hot in the fo'c'sle, anyhow. I got a blanket out of my bunk and curled up behind the fore-hatch; I went to sleep and slept sound, all but a dream I had that Matt Friend was coming over the side with his drowned eyes staring and his wet hands clutching. It waked me up, and I threw out my hand and, sure enough, touched something deadly cold!

I gave a screech fit to raise the dead in good earnest; and then I saw 'twasn't anything but a coil of chain-cable!

"In the morning the wind had gone down some, but the decks were blown full of leaves and rubbish, and by the foot of the main-mast I found a dead bird. I swept everything up clean, and started a fire in the galley and put the kettle on. 'The men'll want something hot, they'll be so tired,' says I to myself, watching the beach. But they never came, and I had to eat breakfast alone, after all. That was the longest day I ever put through. I kept the spy-glass by me and watched the sea as well as land, for it came into my head maybe that voodoo-woman might come along, in case she wasn't at home already. I went and got a musket and some powder and shot, and laid them ready to my hand — though what I expected to do it would be hard to say. She never came, though, nor anybody else. There I stayed alone, with the flat glare of water all around, and the everlasting noisy solitude of the land — and the morning and the evening was the second day, as the Book says. As hot and shadeless as it was, I remember how afraid I was of the coming night, and how it came at last all at once, black and sudden, the way it does in the tropics, while I was still straining my eyes landward and hoping against hope. You see, by that time I felt pretty sure the devils had got Slocum and his men, in spite of their guns. What else could have happened? If there'd been other men on the island, and the skipper's party had had a fight, it stood to reason they couldn't all have killed one another. Somebody ought to have turned up before now. And what was going to become of *me*? I slept, on deck again, but not very sound, and when the first peep of light came, I was up and searching the shore with my glass; there wasn't a sign of life. Then I took a squint seaward, — being still on the lookout for the voodoo, — and there was a sail!

"It was a good-sized ship, slipping through the water at a lively gait. What was more, by the way she tacked and veered, I could see she was making for the island. I could have cried for joy. I didn't know who she was or what she was, and I didn't care; I would have welcomed the *Flying Dutchman*, if she would have taken me away from that awful island. But when she got near enough I recognized her lines and rigging. It was the *Dolly Madison*. She must have seen us lying inside the bar, but whether her skipper suspected something was up, from the strange, still, unpeopled look of us, or was getting

ready for trouble on his own hook, I can't say; anyway, he hove to about a quarter of a mile off shore, and directly I saw them lowering a boat. The men plainly had their instructions, for they came on very slow, half a dozen pulling, as many more armed to the teeth, the same way Slocum's party had been. They made the harbor-entrance without any trouble, and, coming to a stand-still, one stood up in the stern and hailed us: 'Ho, the bark ahoy!'

"I flourished my arm by way of answer, and the man, whom I took for one of the mates, bawled again: 'Ho, the *Laughin' Sallie*! Anything the matter?'

"I screamed out to him to come on board, please, sir, and after a pause, during which the men all turned around to point and stare, talking together, he gave an order, and they rowed up under our stern, still very wary, however. I went aft and waited for 'em, hanging over the rail; the men gaped up at the ship and me for a minute in silence. At last, 'Where's Cap'n Slocum, sonny?' asked the mate.

"'He's gone ashore.'

"'Well, then, where's your crew?'

"'They're gone, too, all except Matt Friend, and he's drowned,' says I, wiping my eyes on my sleeve.

"'D'ye mean to say you're all alone?'

"'Yes, sir.'

"'When did the cap'n and crew leave you?'

"I told him. The mate, after some further hesitation, came over the side, with the armed men after him.

"'Now, look here, sonny,' said he, taking me by the shoulder. 'Tell us all about it from the beginning. What did Cap'n Slocum go ashore for? And what's happened since?'

"I told him that, too, faithfully. When I came to the treasure part, the men exchanged glances. After I had finished, the mate of the *Madison* stood silent, scowling to himself. Then he beckoned to one of the sailors.

"'What d'ye make of it, Isr'l?'

"Isr'l scratched his head, looked around aloft, walked to the side and spat deliberately, then says he: 'Boy's lyin'.'

"'I ain't,' says I, as mad as hops. The mate believed me, anyhow. After some more thinking, he made me tumble into his boat along with the rest, and, leaving the *Laughing Sallie* to mind herself for a while, ordered the men to pull for the beach. We made a landing as near the other boat as we could, and found it lying on the sand, just as it had been left, with the oars in the bottom. The mate told off a couple of men to stand by with guns

and watch the beach, while the rest searched the island; I was to go with them, much against my will. The weapons they carried gave me no confidence; Slocum had been armed, too.

"We started into the jungle at the same place Slocum and his party had entered. They had made quite a distinct path. It wound about a good deal, and we judged they must have got confused somehow, for the path crossed on itself several times. The sailors kept asking me, 'Do you remember this place, Johnny?' 'Did you see that when you were here before?' but I was as much at a loss as any one.

"At last we came to an open space, where a great tribe of carrion-crows got up with a *whuzz-z-z* and settled in the trees all around. There was a man lying on his back in the middle—he hadn't any face or hands left, but, by his clothes, I knew him for that young fellow we called Harelip. The men turned him over; there were no marks of violence on him. It was awful, the hot, still, murky forest, the mutilated corpse, and the crows sitting around eying us, impatient to begin again. It looked bad—bad. 'We'll come back and bury him,' says the mate at length, in a low voice. 'Come on, men.' They fixed up a scarecrow with a shirt on two sticks to keep the birds away from the poor fellow's body, and left him.

"A few hundred yards more brought us, unexpectedly, to the beach, and we found that we had got clear across the island. There was a strip of smooth sand, all over foot marks going every which way, but not a vestige of human life otherwise. We shouted, and even fired off a gun or two, but nobody answered. I think the men were pretty near as uneasy as I by this time; they kept close together, and we all talked in whispers.

"We turned back into the jungle and followed the track a ways without anything happening, until we were brought up sudden by hearing a voice off to the right. It was mumbling something in a rapid and hurried undertone, every now and then going up in a screech. The mate called out, and it stopped for a minute, then began again. When we got to the spot, we found that sailor I told you about, Abel Harper, kneeling on the ground, scratching it with a stick, like he wanted to dig a hole and bury something, and talking to himself all the time. 'Cover it up, cover it up, cover it up!' he kept saying. He was stark mad and just not quite dead, as we could see, from hunger and thirst. We tried every way we knew to get something

sensible out of him, but he wouldn't say a word except that: 'Cover it up, cover it up, cover it up!' Abel Harper never did get back his mind, nor could tell anything of what had happened. He had to be put in an asylum, and lived to be an old man. I used to go and see him when I came off a cruise.

"It wasn't far from there that we at last found the rest. The place looked to me like the clearing where the voodoo-woman's shack had stood, but there was nothing but a pile of charred sticks and ashes there; and the ground around all mummicked up with footprints, some of boots, some of bare feet, and some like cattle-hoofs. The bodies of old Cobb and Mr. Cannon were lying to one side across each other; they hadn't any wounds on 'em, as far as we could make out, but they must have been dead the whole two days, and were pretty far gone.

"We found Slocum sitting bolt upright, dead, with his back against a tree, and his gun rested on a forked twig, pointing to the front; it had been fired. The men said by signs about the body he must have outlasted the others; they thought he hadn't been dead but a few hours. His face was horribly distorted, as if he had died in great pain, but somehow he didn't look frightened — not he! Game to the last, he was. His whole body was as rigid as a handspike; he had such a grip of the gun they couldn't unbend his dead fingers; so they dug a prodigious deep hole, and buried him just as he was. There, on that cursed island, sits Jed Slocum, with his gun across his knee, waiting for the judgment-day."

Cap'n Starr was silent; and, glancing around, I saw Little Nell returning with a burden of berries that might have been the entire annual output of Northport Island. My companion made certain small move-

ments suggestive of the private in the front rank who suddenly encounters the eye of his drill-sergeant fixed upon him.

"There comes Nellie!" said he.

Nellie! Here was an absurd coincidence. The youngster came toward us, rigidly leaning her little body aslant from the weight of the pail, her mouth primly compressed. I was conscious of a great desire to stand well with Nellie.

"You've got ever so many berries — it's wonderful, for such a little girl," I said, in abject propitiation.

She looked at me. "That's what I went for," she said — and the conversation was left without a leg to stand on! I thought I detected a glint of friendly and appreciative amusement in Cap'n Starr's gentle blue eyes.

"You boarding with Cap'n Pearce?" the child asked, with unexpected interest. I meekly acknowledged that I was.

"They have supper at five o'clock," remarked Little Nell abstractedly. "I guess it's 'most five now. Cap'n Pearce's awful particular about folks being on time to their meals." Her grandfather and I rose to our feet with a machine-like unanimity.

"I'd like to come again and sit with you awhile, Cap'n Starr," I said, "and hear the rest of your story — for I'm sure there's more of it. I'd like to know what became of the *Laughing Sallie*; and did no one ever go back there and try again for the treasure?"

"The *Laughing Sallie*?" said he. "Well, to be sure, that would be a long story all by itself. A lot of cruising that old hooker did, and many a port she touched at before she ripped the bottom-boards out of her at last on a reef down toward Salt Cay Bank. I'll tell you about her some day. But the treasure — no, I never heard of anybody offering to meddle with *that* again. For all I know, it's down there still on Barrancos Cay."



THE WAYFARERS

BY

MARY STEWART CUTTING

AUTHOR OF "LITTLE STORIES OF COURTSHIP," "LITTLE STORIES OF MARRIED LIFE," ETC.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALICE BARBER STEPHENS



HERE is no sight more uninspiring than a ferry-boat crowded with human beings at a quarter of six o'clock in the evening, when the great homeward rush from the offices and commercial houses sets in. At that time, although there are some returning shoppers and women type-writers and clerks, the larger number of the passengers are men, sitting in slanting rows to catch the light on the evening paper, or wedged in an upright mass at the forward end of the boat. It is noticeable that, with a few exceptions, those who have gone forth in the morning distinct individuals, well dressed, freshly shaven, with clean linen, an animated manner, a brisk step, and an eager-eyed disposition toward the labors of the day, seem, as they return at night, to be only component parts of a shabby crowd in indistinguishable apparel, and worn to a uniform dullness not only of appearance but of attitude and expression. The hard day's work is over, but the rest is not yet attained. We all know that between the darkness and the dawn comes the period when vitality is at its lowest

ebb, and in all transition periods there is a subtle withdrawing of the old force before the new fills its place. In that temporary collapse in the daily adjustment between two lives, the business and the domestic, many a man with overwrought brain and tired body feels that what he has been looking forward to as a happy rest appears to him now momentarily as an unavoidable and wearying need for further effort. The demand upon him varies in kind, but it is still there.

Men in a mass are neither beautiful nor impressive to look at in the modern black or sad-colored raiment of every-day custom, and it is difficult, as the eyes rest on the faces in these commonplace rows, to realize the space which love inevitably fills in these lives, so far apart from romance do they seem, forgetful as we are of the worn truth that romance is a flowering weed which grows in any soil. For three fourths of these men some woman waits. Those dull eyes can gleam, those set lips can kiss; these be heroes, handsome men, arbiters of destiny! There is positive grotesqueness in the idea, seen in this obliterating haze of fatigue that so maliciously dwarfs and slurs. That man over there