

## Chapter II

What could it mean? I had left Alvarez in command. He was my most loyal subordinate. It was absolutely beyond the pale of possibility that Alvarez should desert me. No, there was some other explanation. Something occurred to place my second officer, Porfirio Johnson, in command—I was sure of it; but why speculate? The futility of conjecture was only too palpable. The *Coldwater* has abandoned us in mid ocean. Doubtless none of us would survive to know why.

The young man at the wheel of the power boat had turned her nose about as it became evident that the ship intended passing over us, and now he still held her in futile pursuit of the *Coldwater*.

“Bring her about, Snider,” I directed, “and hold her due east. We can’t catch the *Coldwater*, and we can’t cross the Atlantic in this. Our only hope lies in making the nearest land, which, unless I am mistaken, is the Scilly Islands, off the southwest coast of England. Ever heard of England, Snider?”

“There’s a part of the United States of North America that used to be known to the ancients as New England,” he replied. “Is that where you mean, sir?”

“No, Snider,” I replied. “The England I refer to was an island off the continent of Europe. It was the seat of a very powerful kingdom that flourished over two hundred years ago. A part of the United States of North America and all of the Federated States of Canada once belonged to this ancient England.”

“Europe,” breathed one of the men, his voice tense with excitement.

“My grandfather used to tell me stories of the world beyond 30. He had been a great student, and he had read much from forbidden books.”

“In which I resemble your grandfather,” I said, “for I, too, have read more even than naval officers are supposed to read, and, as you men know, we are permitted a greater latitude in the study of geography and history than men of other professions.

“Among the books and papers of Admiral Porter Turck, who lived two hundred years ago, and from whom I am descended, many volumes still exist, and are in my possession, which deal with the history and geography of ancient Europe. Usually I bring several of these books with me upon a cruise, and this time, among others, I have maps of Europe and her surrounding waters. I was studying them as we came away from the *Coldwater* this morning, and luckily I have them with me.”

“You are going to try to make Europe, sir?” asked Taylor, the young man who had last spoken.

“It is the nearest land,” I replied. “I have always wanted to explore the forgotten lands of the Eastern Hemisphere. Here’s our chance. To remain at sea is to perish. None of us ever will see home again. Let us make the best of it, and enjoy while we do live that which is forbidden the balance of our race—the adventure and the mystery which lie beyond 30.”

Taylor and Delcarte seized the spirit of my mood; but Snider, I think, was a trifle sceptical.

“It is treason, sir,” I replied; “but there is no law which compels us to visit punishment upon ourselves. Could we return to Pan-America, I should be the first to insist that we face it; but we know that’s not possible. Even if this craft would carry us so far, we haven’t enough water or food for more than three days.

“We are doomed, Snider, to die far from home and without ever again looking upon the face of another fellow countryman than those who sit here now in this boat. Isn’t that punishment sufficient for even the most exacting judge?”

Even Snider had to admit that it was.

“Very well, then, let us live while we live, and enjoy to the fullest whatever of adventure or pleasure each new day brings, since any day may be our last, and we shall be dead for a considerable while.”

I could see that Snider was still fearful; but Taylor and Delcarte responded with a hearty, "Aye, aye, sir!"

They were of different mold. Both were sons of naval officers. They represented the aristocracy of birth, and they dared to think for themselves.

Snider was in the minority, and so we continued toward the east. Beyond 30, and separated from my ship, my authority ceased. I held leadership, if I was to hold it at all, by virtue of personal qualifications only; but I did not doubt my ability to remain the director of our destinies in so far as they were amenable to human agencies. I have always led. While my brain and brawn remain unimpaired I shall continue always to lead. Following is an art which Turcks do not easily learn.

It was not until the third day that we raised land, dead ahead, which I took, from my map, to be the isles of Scilly; but such a gale was blowing that I did not dare attempt to land, and so we passed to the north of them, skirted Land's End, and entered the English Channel.

I think that up to that moment I had never experienced such a thrill as passed through me when I realized that I was navigating those historic waters. The lifelong dreams that I never had dared hope to see fulfilled were at last a reality; but under what forlorn circumstances!

Never could I return to my native land. To the end of my days I must remain in exile. Yet even these thoughts failed to dampen my ardor.

My eyes scanned the waters. To the north I could see the rockbound coast of Cornwall. Mine were the first American eyes to rest upon it for more than two hundred years. In vain I searched for some sign of ancient commerce that, if history is to be believed, must have dotted the bosom of the Channel with white sails and blackened the heavens with the smoke of countless funnels; but as far as eye could reach the tossing waters of the Channel were empty and deserted.

Toward midnight the wind and sea abated, so that shortly after dawn I determined to make inshore in an attempt to effect a landing, for we were sadly in need of fresh water and food.

According to my observations, we were just off Ram Head, and it was my intention to enter Plymouth Bay and visit Plymouth. From my map it appeared that this city lay back from the coast a short distance;

and there was another city given as Devonport, which appeared to lie at the mouth of the river Tamar.

However, I knew that it would make little difference which city we entered, as the English People were famed of old for their hospitality toward visiting mariners. As we approached the mouth of the bay I looked for the fishing craft which I expected to see emerging thus early in the day for their labors; but even after we rounded Ram Head and were well within the waters of the bay I saw no vessel, neither was there buoy nor light nor any other mark to show larger ships the channel, and I wondered much at this.

The coast was densely overgrown, nor was any building or sign of man apparent from the water. Up the bay and into the River Tamar we motored through a solitude as unbroken as that which rested upon the waters of the channel. For all we could see, there was no indication that man had ever set his foot upon this silent coast.

I was nonplused, and then, for the first time, there crept over me an intuition of the truth.

Here was no sign of war. As far as this portion of the Devon coast was concerned, that seemed to have been over for many years; but neither were there any people, yet I could not find it within myself to believe that I should find no inhabitants in England. Reasoning thus, I discovered that it was improbable that a state of war still existed, and that the people all had been drawn from this portion of England to some other, where they might better defend themselves against an invader.

But what of their ancient coast defenses? What was there here in Plymouth Bay to prevent an enemy landing in force and marching where they wished? Nothing. I could not believe that any enlightened military nation, such as the ancient English are reputed to have been, would have voluntarily so deserted an exposed coast and an excellent harbor to the mercies of an enemy.

I found myself becoming more and more deeply involved in quandary. The puzzle which confronted me I could not unravel. We had landed, and I now stood upon the spot where, according to my map, a large city should rear its spires and chimneys. There was nothing but rough, broken ground covered densely with weeds and brambles, and tall, rank, grass.

Had a city ever stood there, no sign of it remained. The roughness and unevenness of the ground suggested something of a great mass of debris hidden by the accumulation of centuries of undergrowth.

I drew the short cutlass with which both officers and men of the navy are, as you know, armed out of courtesy to the traditions and memories of the past, and with its point dug into the loam about the roots of the vegetation growing at my feet.

The blade entered the soil for a matter of seven inches, when it struck upon something stonelike. Digging about the obstacle, I presently loosened it, and when I had withdrawn it from its sepulcher I found the thing to be an ancient brick of clay, baked in an oven.

Delcarte we had left in charge of the boat; but Snider and Taylor were with me, and, following my example, each engaged in the fascinating sport of prospecting for antiques. Each of us uncovered a great number of these bricks, until we commenced to weary of the monotony of it, when Snider suddenly gave an exclamation of excitement, and, as I turned to look, he held up a human skull for my inspection.

I took it from him and examined it. Directly in the center of the forehead was a small round hole. The gentleman had evidently come to his end defending his country from an invader.

Snider again held aloft another trophy of the search—a metal spike and some tarnished and corroded metal ornaments. They had lain close beside the skull.

With the point of his cutlass Snider scraped the dirt and verdigris from the face of the larger ornament.

“An inscription,” he said, and handed the thing to me.

They were the spike and ornaments of an ancient German helmet. Before long we had uncovered many other indications that a great battle had been fought upon the ground where we stood; but I was then and still am at loss to account for the presence of German soldiers upon the English coast so far from London, which history suggests would have been the natural goal of an invader.

I can only account for it by assuming that either England was temporarily conquered by the Teutons, or that an invasion of so fast proportions was undertaken that German troops were hurled upon the English coast in huge numbers and that landings were necessarily

effected at many places simultaneously. Subsequent discoveries tend to strengthen this view.

We dug about for a short time with our cutlasses until I became convinced that a city had stood upon the spot at some time in the past, and that beneath our feet, crumbled and dead, lay ancient Devonport.

I could not repress a sigh at the thought of the havoc war had wrought in this part of England, at least. Farther east, nearer London, we should find things very different. There would be the civilization that two centuries must have wrought upon our English cousins as they had upon us. There would be mighty cities, cultivated fields, happy people. There we would be welcomed as long-lost brothers. There would we find a great nation anxious to learn of the world beyond their side of 30, as I had been anxious to learn of that which lay beyond our side of the dead line.

I turned back toward the boat.

“Come, men!” I said. “We will go up the river and fill our casks with fresh water, search for food and fuel, and then tomorrow be in readiness to push on toward the east. I am going to London.”

## Chapter III

The report of a gun blasted the silence of a dead Devonport with startling abruptness.

It came from the direction of the launch, and in an instant we three were running for the boat as fast as our legs would carry us. As we came in sight of it we saw Delcarte a hundred yards inland from the launch, leaning over something which lay upon the ground. As we called to him he waved his cap, and, stooping, lifted a small deer for our inspection.

I was about to congratulate him on his trophy when we were startled by a horrid, half-human, half-bestial scream a little ahead and to the right of us. It seemed to come from a clump of rank and tangled brush not far from where Delcarte stood. It was a horrid, fearsome sound, the like of which never had fallen upon my ears before.

We looked in the direction from which it came. The smile had died from Delcarte's lips. Even at the distance we were from him I saw his face go suddenly white, and he quickly threw his rifle to his shoulder. At the same moment the thing that had given tongue to the cry moved from the concealing brushwood far enough for us, too, to see it.

Both Taylor and Snider gave little gasps of astonishment and dismay. "What is it, sir?" asked the latter.

The creature stood about the height of a tall man's waist at the shoulders, and was long and gaunt and sinuous, and with a tawny coat striped with black, and with white throat and belly. In conformation it was similar to a cat—a huge cat, exaggerated colossal cat, with fiendish

eyes and the most devilish cast of countenance, as it wrinkled its bristling snout and bared its great yellow fangs.

It was pacing, or rather, slinking, straight for Delcarte, who had now leveled his rifle upon it.

“What is it, sir?” mumbled Snider again, and then a half-forgotten picture from an old natural history sprang to my mind, and I recognized in the frightful beast the *Felis tigris* of ancient Asia, specimens of which had, in former centuries, been exhibited in the Western Hemisphere.

Snider and Taylor were armed with rifles and revolvers, while I carried only a revolver. Seizing Snider’s rifle from his trembling hands, I called to Taylor to follow me, and together we ran forward, shouting, to attract the beast’s attention from Delcarte until we should all be quite close enough to attack with the greatest assurance of success.

I cried to Delcarte not to fire until we reached his side, for I was fearful lest our small caliber, steel-jacketed bullets should, far from killing the beast, tend merely to enrage it still further. But he misunderstood me, thinking that I had ordered him to fire.

With the report of his rifle the tiger stopped short in apparent surprise, then turned and bit savagely at its shoulder for an instant, after which it wheeled again toward Delcarte, issuing the most terrific roars and screams, and launched itself, with incredible speed, toward the brave fellow, who now stood his ground pumping bullets from his automatic rifle as rapidly as the weapon would fire.

Taylor and I also opened up on the creature, and as it was broadside to us it offered a splendid target, though for all the impression we appeared to make upon the great cat we might as well have been launching soap bubbles at it.

Straight as a torpedo it rushed for Delcarte, and, as Taylor and I stumbled on through the tall grass toward our unfortunate comrade, we saw the tiger rear upon him and crush him to the earth.

Not a backward step had the noble Delcarte taken. Two hundred years of peace had not sapped the red blood from his courageous line. He went down beneath that avalanche of bestial savagery still working his gun and with his face toward his antagonist. Even in the instant that I thought him dead I could not help but feel a thrill of pride that he was one of my men—one of my class, a Pan-American gentleman of

birth, and that he had demonstrated one of the principle contentions of the army-and-navy adherents—that military training was necessary for the salvation of personal courage in the Pan-American race which for generations had had to face no dangers more grave than those incident to ordinary life in a highly civilized community, safeguarded by every means at the disposal of a perfectly organized and all-powerful government utilizing the best that advanced science could suggest.

As we ran toward Delcarte, both Taylor and I were struck by the fact that the beast upon him appeared not to be mauling him, but lay quiet and motionless upon its prey, and when we were quite close, and the muzzles of our guns were at the animal's head, I saw the explanation of this sudden cessation of hostilities—*Felis tigris* was dead.

One of our bullets, or one of the last that Delcarte fired, had penetrated the heart, and the beast had died even as it sprawled forward crushing Delcarte to the ground.

A moment later, with our assistance, the man had scrambled from beneath the carcass of his would-be slayer, without a scratch to indicate how close to death he had been.

Delcarte's buoyancy was entirely unruffled. He came from under the tiger with a broad grin on his handsome face, nor could I perceive that a muscle trembled or that his voice showed the least indication of nervousness or excitement.

With the termination of the adventure, we began to speculate upon the explanation of the presence of this savage brute at large so great a distance from its native habitat. My readings had taught me that it was practically unknown outside of Asia, and that, so late as the twentieth century, at least, there had been no savage beasts outside captivity in England.

As we talked, Snider joined us, and I returned his rifle to him. Taylor and Delcarte picked up the slain deer, and we all started down toward the launch, walking slowly. Delcarte wanted to fetch the tiger's skin; but I had to deny him permission, since we had no means to properly cure it.

Upon the beach, we skinned the deer and cut away as much meat as we thought we could dispose of, and as we were again embarking to continue up the river for fresh water and fuel, we were startled by a series of screams from the bushes a short distance away.

“Another *Felis tigris*,” said Taylor.

“Or a dozen of them,” supplemented Delcarte, and, even as he spoke, there leaped into sight, one after another, eight of the beasts — full grown, magnificent specimens.

At sight of us, they came charging down like infuriated demons. I saw that three rifles would be no match for them, and so I gave the word to put out from shore, hoping that the “tiger,” as the ancients called him, could not swim.

Sure enough, they all halted at the beach, pacing back and forth, uttering fiendish cries, and glaring at us in the most malevolent manner.

As we motored away, we presently heard the calls of similar animals far inland. They seemed to be answering the cries of their fellows at the water’s edge, and from the wide distribution an great volume of the sound we came to the conclusion that enormous numbers of these beasts must roam the adjacent country.

“They have eaten up the inhabitants,” murmured Snider, shuddering.

“I imagine you are right,” I agreed, “for their extreme boldness and fearlessness in the presence of man would suggest either that man is entirely unknown to them, or that they are extremely familiar with him as their natural and most easily procured prey.”

“But where did they come from?” asked Delcarte. “Could they have traveled here from Asia?”

I shook my head. The thing was a puzzle to me. I knew that it was practically beyond reason to imagine that tigers had crossed the mountain ranges and rivers and all the great continent of Europe to travel this far from their native lairs, and entirely impossible that they should have crossed the English Channel at all. Yet here they were, and in great numbers.

We continued up the Tamar several miles, filled our casks, and then landed to cook some of our deer steak, and have the first square meal that had fallen to our lot since the *Coldwater* deserted us. But scarce had we built our fire and prepared the meat for cooking than Snider, whose eyes had been constantly roving about the landscape from the moment that we left the launch, touched me on the arm and pointed to a clump of bushes which grew a couple of hundred yards away.