

A Matter of Interest

By Robert W. Chambers

He that knows not, and knows not that he knows not, is a fool. Shun him.
He that knows not, and knows that he knows not, is simple. Teach him.
He that knows, and knows not that he knows, is asleep. Wake him.
He that knows, and knows that he knows, is wise. Follow him.—Arabian Proverb.

I.

Much as I dislike it, I am obliged to include this story in a volume devoted to fiction: I have attempted to tell it as an absolutely true story, but until three months ago, when the indisputable proofs were placed before the British Association by Professor James Holroyd, I was regarded as an impostor. Now that the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, the Philadelphia Zoological Society, and the Natural History Museum of New York city, are convinced that the story is truthful and accurate in every particular, I prefer to tell it my own way. Professor Holroyd urges me to do this, although Professor Bruce Stoddard, of Columbia College, is now at work upon a pamphlet, to be published the latter part of next month, describing scientifically the extraordinary discovery which, to the shame of the United States, was first accepted and recognised in England.

Now, having no technical ability concerning the affair in question, and having no knowledge of either comparative anatomy or zoology, I am perhaps unfitted to tell this story. But the story is true; the episode occurred under my own eyes—here, within a few hours' sail of the Battery. And as I was one of the first persons to verify what has long been a theory among scientists, and, moreover, as the result of Professor Holroyd's discovery is to be placed on exhibition in Madison Square Garden on the twentieth of next month, I have decided to tell, as simply as I am able, exactly what occurred.

I first wrote out the story on April 1, 1896. The North American Review, the Popular Science Monthly, the Scientific American, Nature, Forest and Stream, and the Fossiliferous Magazine in turn rejected it; some curtly informing me that fiction had no place in their columns. When I attempted to explain that it was not fiction, the editors of these periodicals either maintained a contemptuous silence, or bluntly notified me that my literary services and opinions were not desired. But finally, when several publishers offered to take the story as fiction, I cut short all negotiations and decided to publish it myself. Where I am known at all, it is my misfortune to be known as a writer of fiction. This makes it impossible for me to receive a hearing from a scientific audience. I regret it bitterly, because now, when it is too late, I am prepared to prove certain scientific matters of interest, and to produce the proofs. In this case, however, I am fortunate, for nobody can dispute the existence of a thing when the bodily proof is exhibited as evidence.

This is the story; and if I write it as I write fiction, it is because I do not know how to write it otherwise.

I was walking along the beach below Pine Inlet, on the south shore of Long Island. The railroad and telegraph station is at West Oyster Bay. Everybody who has travelled on the Long Island Railroad knows the station, but few, perhaps, know Pine Inlet. Duck shooters, of course,

are familiar with it; but as there are no hotels there, and nothing to see except salt meadow, salt creek, and a strip of dune and sand, the summer-squatting public may probably be unaware of its existence. The local name for the place is Pine Inlet; the maps give its name as Sand Point, I believe, but anybody at West Oyster Bay can direct you to it. Captain McPeek, who keeps the West Oyster Bay House, drives duck shooters there in winter. It lies five miles southeast from West Oyster Bay.

I had walked over that afternoon from Captain McPeek's. There was a reason for my going to Pine Inlet—it embarrasses me to explain it, but the truth is I meditated writing an ode to the ocean. It was out of the question to write it in West Oyster Bay, with the whistle of locomotives in my ears. I knew that Pine Inlet was one of the loneliest places on the Atlantic coast; it is out of sight of everything except leagues of gray ocean. Rarely one might make out fishing smacks drifting across the horizon. Summer squatters never visited it; sportsmen shunned it, except in winter. Therefore, as I was about to do a bit of poetry, I thought that Pine Inlet was the spot for the deed. So I went there.

As I was strolling along the beach, biting my pencil reflectively, tremendously impressed by the solitude and the solemn thunder of the surf, a thought occurred to me: how unpleasant it would be if I suddenly stumbled on a summer boarder. As this joyless impossibility flitted across my mind, I rounded a bleak sand dune.

A summer girl stood directly in my path.

If I jumped, I think the young lady has pardoned me by this time. She ought to, because she also started, and said something in a very faint voice. What she said was “Oh!”

She stared at me as though I had just crawled up out of the sea to bite her. I don't know what my own expression resembled, but I have been given to understand it was idiotic.

Now I perceived, after a few moments, that the young lady was frightened, and I knew I ought to say something civil. So I said, “Are there any mosquitoes here?”

“No,” she replied, with a slight quiver in her voice; “I have only seen one, and it was biting somebody else.”

I looked foolish; the conversation seemed so futile, and the young lady appeared to be more nervous than before. I had an impulse to say, “Do not run; I have breakfasted,” for she seemed to be meditating a plunge into the breakers. What I did say was: “I did not know anybody was here. I do not intend to intrude. I come from Captain McPeek's, and I am writing an ode to the ocean.” After I had said this it seemed to ring in my ears like, “I come from Table Mountain, and my name is Truthful James.”

I glanced timidly at her.

“She's thinking of the same thing,” said I to myself. “What an ass I must appear!”

However, the young lady seemed to be a trifle reassured. I noticed she drew a sigh of relief and looked at my shoes. She looked so long that it made me suspicious, and I also examined my shoes. They seemed to be fairly respectable.

“I—I am sorry,” she said, “but would you mind not walking on the beach?”

This was sudden. I had intended to retire and leave the beach to her, but I did not fancy being driven away so abruptly.

“I was about to withdraw, madam,” said I, bowing stiffly; “I beg you will pardon any inconvenience—”

“Dear me!” she cried, “you don't understand. I do not—I would not think for a moment of asking you to leave Pine Inlet. I merely ventured to request you to walk on the dunes. I am so afraid that your footprints may obliterate the impressions that my father is studying.”

“Oh!” said I, looking about me as though I had been caught in the middle of a flower-bed; “really I did not notice any impressions. Impressions of what—if I may be permitted?”

“I don’t know,” she said, smiling a little at my awkward pose. “If you step this way in a straight line you can do no damage.”

I did as she bade me. I suppose my movements resembled the gait of a wet peacock. Possibly they recalled the delicate manœuvres of the kangaroo. Anyway, she laughed.

This seriously annoyed me. I had been at a disadvantage; I walk well enough when let alone.

“You can scarcely expect,” said I, “that a man absorbed in his own ideas could notice impressions on the sand. I trust I have obliterated nothing.”

As I said this I looked back at the long line of footprints stretching away in prospective across the sand. They were my own. How large they looked! Was that what she was laughing at?

“I wish to explain,” she said gravely, looking at the point of her parasol. “I am very sorry to be obliged to warn you—to ask you to forego the pleasure of strolling on a beach that does not belong to me. Perhaps,” she continued, in sudden alarm, “perhaps this beach belongs to you?”

“The beach? Oh, no,” I said.

“But—but you were going to write poems about it?”

“Only one—and that does not necessitate owning the beach. I have observed,” said I frankly, “that the people who own nothing write many poems about it.”

She looked at me seriously.

“I write many poems,” I added.

She laughed doubtfully.

“Would you rather I went away?” I asked politely.

“I? Why, no—I mean that you may do as you please—except please do not walk on the beach.”

“Then I do not alarm you by my presence?” I inquired. My clothes were a bit ancient. I wore them shooting, sometimes. “My family is respectable,” I added; and I told her my name.

“Oh! Then you wrote ‘Culled Cowslips’ and ‘Faded Fig-Leaves,’ and you imitate Maeterlinck, and you—Oh, I know lots of people that you know;” she cried with every symptom of relief; “and you know my brother.”

“I am the author,” said I coldly, “of ‘Culled Cowslips,’ but ‘Faded Fig-Leaves’ was an earlier work, which I no longer recognise, and I should be grateful to you if you would be kind enough to deny that I ever imitated Maeterlinck. Possibly,” I added, “he imitates me.”

“Now, do you know,” she said, “I was afraid of you at first? Papa is digging in the salt meadows nearly a mile away.”

It was hard to bear.

“Can you not see,” said I, “that I am wearing a shooting coat?”

“I do see—now; but it is so-so old,” she pleaded.

“It is a shooting coat all the same,” I said bitterly.

She was very quiet, and I saw she was sorry.

“Never mind,” I said magnanimously, “you probably are not familiar with sporting goods. If I knew your name I should ask permission to present myself.”

“Why, I am Daisy Holroyd,” she said.

“What! Jack Holroyd’s little sister?”

“Little!” she cried.

“I didn’t mean that,” said I. “You know that your brother and I were great friends in Paris “

“I know,” she said significantly.

“Ahem! Of course,” I said, “Jack and I were inseparable—”

“Except when shut in separate cells,” said Miss Holroyd coldly.

This unfeeling allusion to the unfortunate termination of a Latin-Quarter celebration hurt me.

“The police,” said I, “were too officious.”

“So Jack says,” replied Miss Holroyd demurely.

We had unconsciously moved on along the sand hills, side by side, as we spoke.

“To think,” I repeated, “that I should meet Jack’s little—”

“Please,” she said, “you are only three years my senior.”

She opened the sunshade and tipped it over one shoulder. It was white, and had spots and posies on it.

“Jack sends us every new book you write,” she observed. “I do not approve of some things you write.”

“Modern school,” I mumbled.

“That is no excuse,” she said severely; “Anthony Trollope didn’t do it.”

The foam spume from the breakers was drifting across the dunes, and the little tip-up snipe ran along the beach and teetered and whistled and spread their white-barred wings for a low, straight flight across the shingle, only to tip and skeep and sail on again. The salt sea wind whistled and curled through the crested waves, blowing in perfumed puffs across thickets of sweet bay and cedar. As we passed through the crackling juicy-stemmed marsh weed myriads of fiddler crabs raised their fore-claws in warning and backed away, rustling, through the reeds, aggressive, protesting.

“Like millions of pigmy Ajaxes defying the lightning,” I said.

Miss Holroyd laughed.

“Now I never imagined that authors were clever except in print,” she said.

She was a most extraordinary girl.

“I suppose,” she observed after a moment’s silence—“I suppose I am taking you to my father.”

“Delighted!” I mumbled. “H’m! I had the honour of meeting Professor Holroyd in Paris.”

“Yes; he bailed you and Jack out,” said Miss Holroyd serenely.

The silence was too painful to last.

“Captain McPeek is an interesting man,” I said. I spoke more loudly than I intended; I may have been nervous.

“Yes,” said Daisy Holroyd, “but he has a most singular hotel clerk.”

“You mean Mr. Frisby?”

“I do.”

“Yes,” I admitted, “Mr. Frisby is queer. He was once a bill-poster.”

“I know it!” exclaimed Daisy Holroyd, with some heat. “He ruins landscapes whenever he has an opportunity. Do you know that he has a passion for bill-posting? He has; he posts bills for the pure pleasure of it, just as you play golf, or tennis, or billiards.”

“But he’s a hotel clerk now,” I said; “nobody employs him to post bills.”

“I know it! He does it all by himself for the pure pleasure of it. Papa has engaged him to come down here for two weeks, and I dread it,” said the girl.

What Professor Holroyd might want of Frisby I had not the faintest notion. I suppose Miss Holroyd noticed the bewilderment in my face, for she laughed, and nodded her head twice.

“Not only Mr. Frisby, but Captain McPeek also,” she said.

“You don’t mean to say that Captain McPeek is going to close his hotel!” I exclaimed.

My trunk was there. It contained guarantees of my respectability.

“Oh, no; his wife will keep it open,” replied the girl. “Look! you can see papa now. He’s digging.”

“Where?” I blurted out.

I remembered Professor Holroyd as a prim, spectacled gentleman, with close-cut, snowy beard and a clerical allure. The man I saw digging wore green goggles, a jersey, a battered sou’wester, and hip-boots of rubber. He was delving in the muck of the salt meadow, his face streaming with perspiration, his boots and jersey splashed with unpleasant-looking mud. He glanced up as we approached, shading his eyes with a sunburnt hand.

“Papa, dear,” said Miss Holroyd, “here is Jack’s friend, whom you bailed out of Mazas.”

The introduction was startling. I turned crimson with mortification. The professor was very decent about it; he called me by name at once.

When he said this he looked at his spade. It was clear that he considered me a nuisance and wished to go on with his digging.

“I suppose,” he said, “you are still writing?”

“A little,” I replied, trying not to speak sarcastically. My output had rivaled that of “The Duchess”—in quantity, I mean.

“I seldom read—fiction,” he said, looking restlessly at the hole in the ground.

Miss Holroyd came to my rescue.

“That was a charming story you wrote last,” she said. “Papa should read it—you should, papa; it’s all about a fossil.”

We both looked narrowly at Miss Holroyd. Her smile was guileless.

“Fossils!” repeated the professor. “Do you care for fossils?”

“Very much,” said I.

Now I am not perfectly sure what my object was in lying. I looked at Daisy Holroyd’s dark-fringed eyes. They were very grave.

“Fossils,” said I, “are my hobby.”

I think Miss Holroyd winced a little at this. I did not care. I went on:

“I have seldom had the opportunity to study the subject, but, as a boy, I collected flint arrow-heads

“Flint arrow-heads!” said the professor coldly.

“Yes; they were the nearest things to fossils obtainable,” I replied, marvelling at my own mendacity.

The professor looked into the hole. I also looked. I could see nothing in it. “He’s digging for fossils,” thought I to myself.

“Perhaps,” said the professor cautiously, “you might wish to aid me in a little research—that is to say, if you have an inclination for fossils.” The double-entendre was not lost upon me.

“I have read all your books so eagerly,” said I, “that to join you, to be of service to you in any research, however difficult and trying, would be an honour and a privilege that I never dared to hope for.”

“That,” thought I to myself, “will do its own work.”

But the professor was still suspicious. How could he help it, when he remembered Jack’s escapades, in which my name was always blended! Doubtless he was satisfied that my influence on Jack was evil. The contrary was the case, too.

“Fossils,” he said, worrying the edges of the excavation with his spade, “fossils are not things to be lightly considered.”

“No, indeed!” I protested.

“Fossils are the most interesting as well as puzzling things in the world,” said he.

“They are!” I cried enthusiastically.

“But I am not looking for fossils,” observed the professor mildly.

This was a facer. I looked at Daisy Holroyd. She bit her lip and fixed her eyes on the sea. Her eyes were wonderful eyes.

“Did you think I was digging for fossils in a salt meadow?” queried the professor. “You can have read very little about the subject. I am digging for something quite different.”

I was silent. I knew that my face was a trifle flushed. I longed to say, “Well, what the devil are you digging for?” but I only stared into the hole as though hypnotized.

“Captain McPeek and Frisby ought to be here,” he said, looking first at Daisy and then across the meadows.

I ached to ask him why he had subpoenaed Captain McPeek and Frisby.

“They are coming,” said Daisy, shading her eyes. “Do you see the speck on the meadows?”

“It may be a mud hen,” said the professor.

“Miss Holroyd is right,” I said. “A wagon and team and two men are coming from the north. There is a dog beside the wagon—it’s that miserable yellow dog of Frisby’s.”

“Good gracious!” cried the professor, “you don’t mean to tell me that you see all that at such a distance?”

“Why not?” I said.

“I see nothing,” he insisted.

“You will see that I’m right, presently,” I laughed.

The professor removed his blue goggles and rubbed them, glancing obliquely at me.

“Haven’t you heard what extraordinary eyesight duck shooters have?” said his daughter, looking back at her father. “Jack says that they can tell exactly what kind of a duck is flying before most people could see anything at all in the sky.”

“It’s true,” I said; “it comes to anybody, I fancy, who has had practice.”

The professor regarded me with a new interest. There was inspiration in his eyes. He turned toward the ocean. For a long time he stared at the tossing waves on the beach, then he looked far out to where the horizon met the sea.

“Are there any ducks out there?” he asked at last.

“Yes,” said I, scanning the sea, “there are.”

He produced a pair of binoculars from his coat-tail pocket, adjusted them, and raised them to his eyes.

“H’m! What sort of ducks?”

I looked more carefully, holding both hands over my forehead.

“Surf ducks—scoters and widgeon. There is one bufflehead among them—no, two; the rest are coots,” I replied.

“This,” cried the professor, “is most astonishing. I have good eyes, but I can’t see a blessed thing without these binoculars!”

“It’s not extraordinary,” said I; “the surf ducks and coots any novice might recognise; the widgeon and buffleheads I should not have been able to name unless they had risen from the water. It is easy to tell any duck when it is flying, even though it looks no bigger than a black pin-point.”

But the professor insisted that it was marvellous, and he said that I might render him invaluable service if I would consent to come and camp at Pine Inlet for a few weeks.

I looked at his daughter, but she turned her back—not exactly in disdain either. Her back was beautifully moulded. Her gown fitted also.

“Camp out here?” I repeated, pretending to be unpleasantly surprised.

“I do not think he would care to,” said Miss Holroyd without turning.

I had not expected that.

“Above all things,” said I, in a clear, pleasant voice, “I like to camp out.”

She said nothing.

“It is not exactly camping,” said the professor. “Come, you shall see our conservatory. Daisy, come, dear! you must put on a heavier frock; it is getting toward sundown.”

At that moment, over a near dune, two horses’ heads appeared, followed by two human heads, then a wagon, then a yellow dog.

I turned triumphantly to the professor.

“You are the very man I want,” he muttered; “the very man—the very man.”

I looked at Daisy Holroyd. She returned my glance with a defiant little smile.

“Waal,” said Captain McPeek, driving up, “here we be! Git out, Frisby.”

Frisby, fat, nervous, and sentimental, hopped out of the cart.

“Come!” said the professor, impatiently moving across the dunes. I walked with Daisy Holroyd. McPeek and Frisby followed. The yellow dog walked by himself.

II.

The sun was dipping into the sea as we trudged across the meadows toward a high dome-shaped dune covered with cedars and thickets of sweet bay. I saw no sign of habitation among the sand hills. Far as the eye could reach, nothing broke the gray line of sea and sky save the squat dunes crowned with stunted cedars.

Then, as we rounded the base of the dune, we almost walked into the door of a house. My amazement amused Miss Holroyd, and I noticed also a touch of malice in her pretty eyes. But she said nothing, following her father into the house, with the slightest possible gesture to me. Was it invitation, or was it menace?

The house was merely a light wooden frame, covered with some waterproof stuff that looked like a mixture of rubber and tar. Over this—in fact, over the whole roof—was pitched an awning of heavy sail-cloth. I noticed that the house was anchored to the sand by chains, already rusted red. But this one-storied house was not the only building nestling in the south shelter of the big dune. A hundred feet away stood another structure—long, low, also built of wood. It had rows on rows of round portholes on every side. The ports were fitted with heavy glass, hinged to swing open if necessary. A single big double door occupied the front.

Behind this long, low building was still another, a mere shed. Smoke rose from the sheet-iron chimney. There was somebody moving about inside the open door.

As I stood gaping at this mushroom hamlet the professor appeared at the door and asked me to enter. I stepped in at once.

The house was much larger than I had imagined. A straight hallway ran through the centre from east to west. On either side of this hallway were rooms, the doors swinging wide open. I counted three doors on each side; the three on the south appeared to be bedrooms.

The professor ushered me into a room on the north side, where I found Captain McPeek and Frisby sitting at a table, upon which were drawings and sketches of articulated animals and fishes.

“You see, McPeek,” said the professor, “we only wanted one more man, and I think I’ve got him.—Haven’t I?” turning eagerly to me.

“Why, yes,” I said, laughing; “this is delightful. Am I invited to stay here?”

“Your bedroom is the third on the south side; everything is ready. McPeek, you can bring his trunk to-morrow, can’t you?” demanded the professor.

The red-faced captain nodded, and shifted a quid.

“Then it’s all settled,” said the professor, and he drew a sigh of satisfaction. “You see,” he said, turning to me, “I was at my wit’s end to know whom to trust. I never thought of you. Jack’s out in China, and I didn’t dare trust anybody in my own profession. All you care about is writing verses and stories, isn’t it?”

“I like to shoot,” I replied mildly.

“Just the thing!” he cried, beaming at us all in turn. “Now I can see no reason why we should not progress rapidly. McPeek, you and Frisby must get those boxes up here before dark. Dinner will be ready before you have finished unloading. Dick, you will wish to go to your room first.”

My name isn’t Dick, but he spoke so kindly, and beamed upon me in such a fatherly manner, that I let it go. I had occasion to correct him afterward, several times, but he always forgot the next minute. He calls me Dick to this day.

It was dark when Professor Holroyd, his daughter, and I sat down to dinner. The room was the same in which I had noticed the drawings of beast and bird, but the round table had been extended into an oval, and neatly spread with dainty linen and silver.

A fresh-cheeked Swedish girl appeared from a further room, bearing the soup. The professor ladled it out, still beaming.

“Now, this is very delightful!—isn’t it, Daisy?” he said.

“Very,” said Miss Holroyd, with the faintest tinge of irony.

“Very,” I repeated heartily; but I looked at my soup when I said it.

“I suppose,” said the professor, nodding mysteriously at his daughter, “that Dick knows nothing of what we’re about down here?”

“I suppose,” said Miss Holroyd, “that he thinks we are digging for fossils.”

I looked at my plate. She might have spared me that.

“Well, well,” said her father, smiling to himself, “he shall know everything by morning. You’ll be astonished, Dick, my boy.”

“His name isn’t Dick,” corrected Daisy.

The professor said, “Isn’t it?” in an absentminded way, and relapsed into contemplation of my necktie.

I asked Miss Holroyd a few questions about Jack, and was informed that he had given up law and entered the diplomatic service—as what, I did not dare ask, for I know what our diplomatic service is.

“In China,” said Daisy.

“Choo Choo is the name of the city,” added her father proudly; “it’s the terminus of the new trans-Siberian railway.”

“It’s on the Yellow River,” said Daisy.

“He’s vice-consul,” added the professor triumphantly.

“He’ll make a good one,” I observed. I knew Jack. I pitied his consul.

So we chatted on about my old playmate, until Freda, the red-checked maid, brought coffee, and the professor lighted a cigar, with a little bow to his daughter.

“Of course, you don’t smoke,” she said to me, with a glimmer of malice in her eyes.

“He mustn’t,” interposed the professor hastily; “it will make his hand tremble.”

“No, it doesn’t,” said I, laughing; “but my hand will shake if I don’t smoke. Are you going to employ me as a draughtsman?”

“You’ll know to-morrow,” he chuckled, with a mysterious smile at his daughter.—“Daisy, give him my best cigars; put the box here on the table. We can’t afford to have his hand tremble.”

Miss Holroyd rose, and crossed the hallway to her father’s room, returning presently with a box of promising-looking cigars.

“I don’t think he knows what is good for him,” she said. “He should smoke only one every day.”

It was hard to bear. I am not vindictive, but I decided to treasure up a few of Miss Holroyd’s gentle taunts. My intimacy with her brother was certainly a disadvantage to me now. Jack had apparently been talking too much, and his sister appeared to be thoroughly acquainted with my past. It was a disadvantage. I remembered her vaguely as a girl with long braids, who used to come on Sundays with her father and take tea with us in our rooms. Then she went to Germany to school, and Jack and I employed our Sunday evenings otherwise. It is true that I regarded her weekly visits as a species of infliction, but I did not think I ever showed it.

“It is strange,” said I, “that you did not recognise me at once, Miss Holroyd. Have I changed so greatly in live years?”

“You wore a pointed French beard in Paris,” she said—“a very downy one. And you never stayed to tea but twice, and then you only spoke once.”

“Oh!” said I blankly. “What did I say?”

“You asked me if I liked plums,” said Daisy, bursting into an irresistible ripple of laughter.

I saw that I must have made the same sort of an ass of myself that most boys of eighteen do.

It was too bad. I never thought about the future in those days. Who could have imagined that little Daisy Holroyd would have grown up into this bewildering young lady? It was really too bad. Presently the professor retired to his room, carrying with him an armful of drawings, and bidding us not to sit up late. When he closed his door Miss Holroyd turned to me.

“Papa will work over those drawings until midnight,” she said, with a despairing smile.

“It isn’t good for him,” I said. “What are the drawings?”

“You may know to-morrow,” she answered, leaning forward on the table and shading her face with one hand. “Tell me about yourself and Jack in Paris.”

I looked at her suspiciously.

“What! There isn’t much to tell. We studied. Jack went to the law school, and I attended—er—oh, all sorts of schools.”

“Did you? Surely you gave yourself a little recreation occasionally?”

“Occasionally,” I nodded.

“I am afraid you and Jack studied too hard.”

“That may be,” said I, looking meek.

“Especially about fossils.”

I couldn’t stand that.

“Miss Holroyd,” I said, “I do care for fossils. You may think that I am a hum-bug, but I have a perfect mania for fossils—now.”

“Since when?”

“About an hour ago,” I said airily. Out of the corner of my eye I saw that she had flushed up. It pleased me.

“You will soon tire of the experiment,” she said with a dangerous smile.

“Oh, I may,” I replied indifferently.

She drew back. The movement was scarcely perceptible, but I noticed it, and she knew I did.

The atmosphere was vaguely hostile. One feels such mental conditions and changes instantly. I picked up a chessboard, opened it, set up the pieces with elaborate care, and began to move, first the white, then the black. Miss Holroyd watched me coldly at first, but after a dozen moves she became interested and leaned a shade nearer. I moved a black pawn forward.

“Why do you do that?” said Daisy.

“Because,” said I, “the white queen threatens the pawn.”

“It was an aggressive move,” she insisted.

“Purely defensive,” I said. “If her white highness will let the pawn alone, the pawn will let the queen alone.”

Miss Holroyd rested her chin on her wrist and gazed steadily at the board. She was flushing furiously, but she held her ground.

“If the white queen doesn’t block that pawn, the pawn may become dangerous,” she said coldly.

I laughed, and closed up the board with a snap.

“True,” I said, “it might even take the queen.” After a moment’s silence I asked, “What would you do in that case, Miss Holroyd?”

“I should resign,” she said serenely; then realizing what she had said, she lost her self-possession for a second, and cried: “No, indeed! I should fight to the bitter end! I mean—”

“What?” I asked, lingering over my revenge.

“I mean,” she said slowly, “that your black pawn would never have the chance—never! I should take it immediately.”

“I believe you would,” said I, smiling; “so we’ll call the game yours, and—the pawn captured.”

“I don’t want it,” she exclaimed. “A pawn is worthless.”

“Except when it’s in the king row.”

“Chess is most interesting,” she observed sedately. She had completely recovered her self-control. Still I saw that she now had a certain respect for my defensive powers. It was very soothing to me.

“You know,” said I gravely, “that I am fonder of Jack than of anybody. That’s the reason we never write each other, except to borrow things. I am afraid that when I was a young cub in France I was not an attractive personality.”

“On the contrary,” said Daisy, smiling, “I thought you were very big and very perfect. I had illusions. I wept often when I went home and remembered that you never took the trouble to speak to me but once.”

“I was a cub,” I said; “not selfish and brutal, but I didn’t understand schoolgirls. I never had any sisters, and I didn’t know what to say to very young girls. If I had imagined that you felt hurt—”

“Oh, I did—five years ago. Afterward I laughed at the whole thing.”

“Laughed?” I repeated, vaguely disappointed.

“Why, of course. I was very easily hurt when I was a child. I think I have outgrown it.”

The soft curve of her sensitive mouth contradicted her.

“Will you forgive me now?” I asked.

“Yes. I had forgotten the whole thing until I met you an hour or so ago.”

There was something that had a ring not entirely genuine in this speech. I noticed it, but forgot it the next moment.

“Tiger cubs have stripes,” said I. “Selfishness blossoms in the cradle, and prophecy is not difficult. I hope I am not more selfish than my brothers.”

“I hope not,” she said, smiling.

Presently she rose, touched her hair with the tip of one finger, and walked to the door.

“Good-night,” she said, courtesying very low.

“Good-night,” said I, opening the door for her to pass.

III.

The sea was a sheet of silver, tinged with pink. The tremendous arch of the sky was all shimmering and glimmering with the promise of the sun. Already the mist above, flecked with clustered clouds, flushed with rose colour and dull gold. I heard the low splash of the waves breaking and curling across the beach. A wandering breeze, fresh and fragrant, blew the curtains of my window. There was the scent of sweet bay in the room, and everywhere the subtle, nameless perfume of the sea.

When at last I stood upon the shore, the air and sea were all aglitter in a rosy light, deepening to crimson in the zenith. Along the beach I saw a little cove, shelving and all ashine, where shallow waves washed with a mellow sound. Fine as dusted gold the shingle glowed, and the thin film of water rose, receded, crept up again a little higher, and again flowed back, with the low hiss of snowy foam and gilded bubbles breaking.

I stood a little while quiet, my eyes upon the water, the invitation of the ocean in my ears, vague and sweet as the murmur of a shell. Then I looked at my bathing suit and towels.

“In we go!” said I aloud. A second later the prophecy was fulfilled.

I swam far out to sea, and as I swam the waters all around me turned to gold. The sun had risen.

There is a fragrance in the sea at dawn that none can name. Whitethorn abloom in May, sedges asway, and scented rushes rustling in an inland wind recall the sea to me—I can’t say why.

Far out at sea I raised myself, swung around, dived, and set out again for shore, striking strong strokes until the flecked foam flew. And when at last I shot through the breakers, I laughed aloud and sprang upon the beach, breathless and happy. Then from the ocean came another cry, clear, joyous, and a white arm rose in the air.

She came drifting in with the waves like a white sea-sprite, laughing at me from her tangled hair, and I plunged into the breakers again to join her.

Side by side we swam along the coast, just outside the breakers, until in the next cove we saw the flutter of her maid’s cap strings.

“I will beat you to breakfast!” she cried, as I rested, watching her glide up along the beach.

“Done!” said I—“for a sea-shell!”

“Done!” she called across the water.

I made good speed along the shore, and I was not long in dressing, but when I entered the dining-room she was there, demure, smiling, exquisite in her cool, white frock.

“The sea-shell is yours,” said I. “I hope I can find one with a pearl in it.”

The professor hurried in before she could reply. He greeted me very cordially, but there was an abstracted air about him, and he called rue Dick until I recognised that remonstrance was useless. He was not long over his coffee and rolls.

“McPeek and Frisby will return with the last load, including your trunk, by early afternoon,” he said, rising and picking up his bundle of drawings. “I haven’t time to explain to you what we are doing, Dick, but Daisy will take you about and instruct you. She will give you the rifle standing in my room—it’s a good Winchester. I have sent for an ‘Express’ for you, big enough to knock over any elephant in India.—Daisy, take him through the sheds and tell him everything. Luncheon is at noon.—Do you usually take luncheon, Dick?”

“When I am permitted,” I smiled.

“Well,” said the professor doubtfully, “you mustn’t come back here for it. Freda can take you what you want. Is your hand unsteady after eating?”

“Why, papa!” said Daisy. “Do you intend to starve him?”

We all laughed.

The professor tucked his drawings into a capacious pocket, pulled his sea boots up to his hips, seized a spade, and left, nodding to us as though he were thinking of something else.

We went to the door and watched him across the salt meadows until a distant sand dune hid him.

“Come,” said Daisy Holroyd, “I am going to take you to the shop.”

She put on a broad-brimmed straw hat, a distractingly pretty combination of filmy cool stuffs, and led the way to the long low structure that I had noticed the evening before.

The interior was lighted by the numberless little portholes, and I could see everything plainly. I acknowledge I was nonplussed by what I did see.

In the centre of the shed, which must have been at least a hundred feet long, stood what I thought at first was the skeleton of an enormous whale. After a moment’s silent contemplation of the thing I saw that it could not be a whale, for the frames of two gigantic bat-like wings rose from each shoulder. Also I noticed that the animal possessed legs—four of them—with most unpleasant-looking webbed claws fully eight feet long. The bony framework of the head, too, resembled something between a crocodile and a monstrous snapping turtle. The walls of the shanty were hung with drawings and blue prints. A man dressed in white linen was tinkering with the vertebræ of the lizard-like tail.

“Where on earth did such a reptile come from?” I asked at length.

“Oh, it’s not real!” said Daisy scornfully; “it’s papier-mache.”

“I see,” said I—“a stage prop.”

“A what?” asked Daisy, in hurt astonishment.

“Why, a—a sort of Siegfried dragon—a what’s-his-name——er, Pfafner, or Peffer, or—”

“If my father heard you say such things he would dislike you,” said Daisy. She looked grieved, and moved toward the door. I apologized—for what, I knew not—and we became reconciled. She ran into her father’s room and brought me the rifle, a very good Winchester. She also gave me a cartridge belt, full.

“Now,” she smiled, “I shall take you to your observatory, and when we arrive you are to begin your duty at once.”

“And that duty?” I ventured, shouldering the rifle.

“That duty is, to watch the ocean. I shall then explain the whole affair—but you mustn’t look at me while I speak; you must watch the sea.”

“This,” said I, “is hardship. I had rather go without the luncheon.”

I do not think she was offended at my speech; still she frowned for almost three seconds.

We passed through acres of sweet bay and spear grass, sometimes skirting thickets of twisted cedars, sometimes walking in the full glare of the morning sun, sinking into shifting sand where

sun-scorched shells crackled under our feet, and sun-browned seaweed glistened, bronzed and iridescent. Then, as we climbed a little hill, the sea wind freshened in our faces, and lo! the ocean lay below us, far-stretching as the eye could reach, glittering, magnificent.

Daisy sat down flat on the sand. It takes a clever girl to do that and retain the respectful deference due her from men. It takes a graceful girl to accomplish it triumphantly when a man is looking.

“You must sit beside me,” she said—as though it would prove irksome to me.

“Now,” she continued, “you must watch the water while I am talking.”

I nodded.

“Why don’t you do it, then?” she asked.

I succeeded in wrenching my head toward the ocean, although I felt sure it would swing gradually round again in spite of me.

“To begin with,” said Daisy Holroyd, “there’s a thing in that ocean that would astonish you if you saw it. Turn your head!”

“I am,” I said meekly.

“Did you hear what I said?”

“Yes—er—a thing in the ocean that’s going to astonish me.” Visions of mermaids rose before me.

“The thing,” said Daisy, “is a Thermosaurus!

I nodded vaguely, as though anticipating a delightful introduction to a nautical friend.

“You don’t seem astonished,” she said reproachfully.

“Why should I be?” I asked.

“Please turn your eyes toward the water. Suppose a Thermosaurus should look out of the waves!”

“Well,” said I, “in that case the pleasure would be mutual.”

She frowned, and bit her upper lip.

“Do you know what a Thermosaurus is?” she asked.

“If I am to guess,” said I, “I guess it’s a jellyfish.”

“It’s that big, ugly, horrible creature that I showed you in the shed!” cried Daisy impatiently.

“Eh!” I stammered.

“Not papier-mache either,” she continued excitedly; “it’s a real one.”

This was pleasant news. I glanced instinctively at my rifle and then at the ocean.

“Well,” said I at last, “it strikes me that you and I resemble a pair of Andromedas waiting to be swallowed. This rifle won’t stop a beast, a live beast, like that Nibelungen dragon of yours.”

“Yes, it will,” she said; “it’s not an ordinary rifle.”

Then, for the first time, I noticed, just below the magazine, a cylindrical attachment that was strange to me.

“Now, if you will watch the sea very carefully, and will promise not to look at me,” said Daisy, “I will try to explain.”

She did not wait for me to promise, but went on eagerly, a sparkle of excitement in her blue eyes:

“You know, of all the fossil remains of the great bat-like and lizard-like creatures that inhabited the earth ages and ages ago, the bones of the gigantic saurians are the most interesting. I think they used to splash about the water and fly over the land during the Carboniferous period; anyway, it doesn’t matter. Of course, you have seen pictures of reconstructed creatures such as the Ichthyosaurus, the Plesiosaurus, the Anthracosaurus, and the Thermosaurus?”

I nodded, trying to keep my eyes from hers.

“And you know that the remains of the Thermosaurus were first discovered and reconstructed by papa?”

“Yes,” said I. There was no use in saying no.

“I am glad you do. Now, papa has proved that this creature lived entirely in the Gulf Stream, emerging for occasional flights across an ocean or two. Can you imagine how fe proved it?”

“No,” said I, resolutely pointing my nose at the ocean.

“He proved it by a minute examination of the microscopical shells found among the ribs of the Thermosaurus. These shells contained little creatures that live only in the warm waters of the Gulf Stream. They were the food of the Thermosaurus”

“It was rather slender rations for a thing like that, wasn’t it? Did he ever swallow bigger food—er—men?”

“Oh, yes. Tons of fossil bones from prehistoric men are also found in the interior of the Thermosaurus”

“Then,” said I, “you, at least, had better go back to Captain McPeek’s”

“Please turn around; don’t be so foolish. I didn’t say there was a live Thermosaurus in the water, did I?”

“Isn’t there?”

“Why, no!”

My relief was genuine, but I thought of the rifle and looked suspiciously out to sea.

“What’s the Winchester for?” I asked.

“Listen, and I will explain. Papa has found out—how, I do not exactly understand—that there is in the waters of the Gulf Stream the body of a Tliermosaurus. The creature must have been alive within a year or so. The impenetrable scale armour that covers its body has, as far as papa knows, prevented its disintegration. We know that it is there still, or was there within a few months. Papa has reports and sworn depositions from steamer captains and seamen from a dozen different vessels, all corroborating each other in essential details. These stories, of course, get into the newspapers—sea-serpent stories—but papa knows that they confirm his theory that the huge body of this reptile is swinging along somewhere on the Gulf Stream.”

She opened her sunshade and held it over her. I noticed that she deigned to give me the benefit of about one eighth of it.

“Your duty with that rifle is this: If we are fortunate enough to see the body of the Thermosaurus come floating by, you are to take good aim and fire—fire rapidly every bullet in the magazine; then reload and lire again, and reload and fire as long as you have any cartridges left.”

“A sell-feeding Maxim is what I should have,” I said with gentle sarcasm. “Well, and suppose I make a sieve of this big lizard?”

“Do you see these rings in the sand?” she asked.

Sure enough, somebody had driven heavy piles deep into the sand all around us, and to the tops of these piles were attached steel rings, half buried under the spear grass. We sat almost exactly in the centre of a circle of these rings.

“The reason is this,” said Daisy: “every bullet in your cartridges is steel-tipped and armour-piercing. To the base of each bullet is attached a thin wire of pallium. Pallium is that new metal, a thread of which, drawn out into finest wire, will hold a ton of iron suspended. Every bullet is fitted with minute coils of miles of this wire. When the bullet leaves the rifle it spins out this wire as a shot from a life-saver’s mortar spins out and carries the life line to a wrecked ship. The end

of each coil of wire is attached to that cylinder under the magazine of your rifle. As soon as the shell is automatically ejected this wire flies out also. A bit of scarlet tape is fixed to the end, so that it will be easy to pick up. There is also a snap clasp on the end, and this clasp fits those rings that you see in the sand. Now, when you begin firing, it is my duty to run and pick up the wire ends and attach them to the rings. Then, you see, we have the body of the Thermosaurus full of bullets, every bullet anchored to the shore by tiny wires, each of which could easily bold a ton's strain."

I looked at her in amazement.

"Then," she added calmly, "we have captured the Thermosaurus."

"Your father," said I at length, "must have spent years of labour over this preparation."

"It is the work of a lifetime," she said simply.

My face, I suppose, showed my misgivings.

"It must not fail," she added.

"But—but we are nowhere near the Gulf Stream," I ventured.

Her face brightened, and she frankly held the sunshade over us both.

"Ala, you don't know," she said, "what else papa has discovered. Would you believe that he has found a loop in the Gulf Stream—a genuine loop that swings in here just outside of the breakers below? It is true! Everybody on Long Island knows that there is a warm current off the coast, but nobody imagined it was merely a sort of backwater from the Gulf Stream that formed a great circular millrace around the cone of a subterranean volcano, and rejoined the Gulf Stream off Cape Albatross. But it is! That is why papa bought a yacht three years ago and sailed about for two years so mysteriously. Oh, I did want to go with him so much!"

"This," said I, "is most astonishing."

She leaned enthusiastically toward me, her lovely face aglow.

"Isn't it?" she said; "and to think that you and papa and I are the only people in the whole world who know this!"

To be included in such a trilogy was very delightful.

"Papa is writing the whole thing—I mean about the currents. He also has in preparation sixteen volumes on the Thermosaurus. He said this morning that he was going to ask you to write the story first for some scientific magazine. He is certain that Professor Bruce Stoddard, of Columbia, will write the pamphlets necessary. This will give papa time to attend to the sixteen-volume work, which he expects to finish in three years."

"Let us first," said I, laughing, "catch our Thermosaurus."

"We must not fail," she said wistfully.

"We shall not fail," I said, "for I promise to sit on this sand hill as long as I live—until a Thermosaurus appears—if that is your wish, Miss Holroyd."

Our eyes met for an instant. She did not chide me, either, for not looking at the ocean. Her eyes were bluer, anyway.

"I suppose," she said, bending her head and absently pouring sand between her fingers—"I suppose you think me a blue-stocking, or something odious?"

"Not exactly," I said. There was an emphasis in my voice that made her colour. After a moment she laid the sunshade down, still open.

"May I hold it?" I asked.

She nodded almost imperceptibly.

The ocean had turned a deep marine blue, verging on purple, that heralded a scorching afternoon. The wind died away; the odour of cedar and sweet bay hung heavy in the air.

In the sand at our feet an iridescent flower beetle crawled, its metallic green and blue wings burning like a spark. Great gnats, with filmy, glittering wings, danced aimlessly above the young golden-rod; burnished crickets, inquisitive, timid, ran from under chips of driftwood, waved their antennæ at us, and ran back again. One by one the marbled tiger beetles tumbled at our feet, dazed from the exertion of an aerial flight, then scrambled and ran a little way, or darted into the wire grass, where great brilliant spiders eyed them askance from their gossamer hammocks.

Far out at sea the white gulls floated and drifted on the water, or sailed up into the air to flap lazily for a moment and settle back among the waves. Strings of black surf ducks passed, their strong wings tipping the surface of the water; single wandering coots whirled from the breakers into lonely flight toward the horizon.

We lay and watched the little ring-necks running along the water's edge, now backing away from the incoming tide, now boldly wading after the undertow. The harmony of silence, the deep perfume, the mystery of waiting for that something that all await—what is it? love? death? or only the miracle of another morrow?—troubled me with vague restfulness. As sunlight casts shadows, happiness, too, throws a shadow, and the shadow is sadness.

And so the morning wore away until Freda came with a cool-looking hamper. Then delicious cold fowl and lettuce sandwiches and champagne cup set our tongues wagging as only very young tongues can wag. Daisy went back with Freda after luncheon, leaving me a case of cigars, with a bantering smile. I dozed, half awake, keeping a partly closed eye on the ocean, where a faint gray streak showed plainly amid the azure water all around. That was the Gulf Stream loop.

About four o'clock Frisby appeared with a bamboo shelter tent, for which I was unaffectedly grateful.

After he had erected it over me he stopped to chat a bit, but the conversation bored me, for he could talk of nothing but bill-posting.

"You wouldn't ruin the landscape here, would you?" I asked.

"Ruin it!" repeated Frisby nervously. "It's ruined now; there ain't a place to stick a bill."

"The snipe stick bills—in the sand," I said flippantly.

There was no humour about Frisby. "Do they?" he asked.

I moved with a certain impatience.

"Bills," said Frisby, "give spice an variety to Nature. They break the monotony of the everlastin' green and what-you-may call-its."

I glared at him.

"Bills," he continued, "are not easy to stick, lemme tell you, sir. Sign paintin's a soft snap when it comes to bill-stickin'. Now, I guess I've stuck more bills in New York State than ennybody."

"Have you?" I said angrily.

"Yes, siree! I always pick out the purtiest spots—kinder filled chuck full of woods and brooks and things; then I h'ist ray paste-pot onto a rock, and I slather that rock with gum, and whoop she goes!"

"Whoop what goes?"

"The bill. I paste her onto the rock, with one swipe of the brush for the edges and a back-handed swipe for the finish—except when a bill is folded in two halves."

"And what do you do then?" I asked, disgusted.

"Swipe twice," said Frisby with enthusiasm.

"And you don't think it injures the landscape?"

"Injures it!" he exclaimed, convinced that I was attempting to joke.

I looked wearily out to sea. lie also looked at the water and sighed sentimentally.

“Floatin’ buoys with bills onto ’em is a idea of mine,” he observed. “That damn ocean is monotonous, ain’t it?”

I don’t know what I might have done to Frisby—the rifle was so convenient if his mean yellow dog had not waddled up at this juncture.

“Hi, Davy, sic ’em!” said Frisby, expectorating upon a clamshell and hurling it seaward. The cur watched the flight of the shell apathetically, then squatted in the sand and looked at his master.

“Kinder lost his spirit,” said Frisby, “ain’t lie? I once stuck a bill onto Davy, an’ it come off, an’ the paste sorter sickened him. He was hell on rats—once!”

After a moment or two Frisby took himself off, whistling cheerfully to Davy, who followed him when he was ready. The rifle burned in my fingers.

It was nearly six o’clock when the professor appeared, spade on shoulder, boots smeared with mud.

“Well,” he said, “nothing to report, Dick, my boy?”

“Nothing, professor.”

He wiped his shining face with his handkerchief and stared at the water.

“My calculations lead me to believe,” he said, “that our prize may be due any day now. This theory I base upon the result of the report from the last sea captain I saw. I can not understand why some of these captains did not take the carcass in tow. They all say that they tried, but that the body sank before they could come within half a mile. The truth is, probably, that they did not stir a foot from their course to examine the thing.”

“Have you ever cruised about for it?” I ventured.

“For two years,” he said grimly. “It’s no use; it’s accident when a ship falls in with it. One captain reports it a thousand miles from where the last skipper spoke it, and always in the Gulf Stream. They think it is a different specimen every time, and the papers are teeming with sea-serpent fol-de-rol.”

“Are you sure,” I asked, “that it will swing in to the coast on this Gulf Stream loop?”

“I think I may say that it is certain to do so. I experimented with a dead right whale. You may have heard of its coming ashore here last summer.”

“I think I did,” said I with a faint smile. The thing had poisoned the air for miles around.

“But,” I continued, “suppose it comes in the night?”

He laughed.

“There I am lucky. Every night this month, and every day, too, the current of the loop runs inland so far that even a porpoise would strand for at least twelve hours. Longer than that I have not experimented with, but I know that the shore trend of the loop runs across a long spur of the submerged volcanic mountain, and that anything heavier than a porpoise would scrape the bottom and be carried so slowly that at least twelve hours must elapse before the carcass could float again into deep water. There are chances of its stranding indefinitely, too, but I don’t care to take those chances. That is why I have stationed you here, Dick, my boy.”

lie glanced again at the water, smiling to himself.

“There is another question I want to ask,” I said, “if you don’t mind.”

“Of course not!” he said warmly.

“What are you digging for?”

“Why, simply for exercise. The doctor told me I was killing myself with my sedentary habits, so I decided to dig. I don’t know a better exercise. Do you?”

“I suppose not,” I murmured, rather red in the face. I wondered whether he’d mention fossils.

“Did Daisy tell you why we are making our papier-mache Thermosaurus?” he asked.

I shook my head.

“We constructed that from measurements I took from the fossil remains of the Thermosaurus in the Metropolitan Museum. Professor Bruce Stoddard made the drawings. We set it up here, all ready to receive the skin of the carcass that I am expecting.”

We had started toward home, walking slowly across the darkening dunes, shoulder to shoulder. The sand was deep, and walking was not easy.

“I wish,” said I at last, “that I knew why Miss Holroyd asked me not to walk on the beach. It’s much less fatiguing.”

“That,” said the professor, “is a matter that I intend to discuss with you to-night.” He spoke gravely, almost sadly. I felt that something of unparalleled importance was soon to be revealed. So I kept very quiet, watching the ocean out of the corners of my eyes.

IV.

Dinner was ended. Daisy Holroyd lighted her father’s pipe for him, and insisted on my smoking as much as I pleased. Then she sat down, and folded her hands like a good little girl, waiting for her father to make the revelation which I felt in my bones must be something out of the ordinary.

The professor smoked for a while, gazing meditatively at his daughter. then, fixing his gray eyes on me, he said:

“Have you ever heard of the kree—that Australian bird, half parrot, half hawk, that destroys so many sheep in New South Wales?”

I nodded.

“The kree kills a sheep by alighting on its back and tearing away the flesh with its hooked beak until a vital part is reached. You know that? Well, it has been discovered that the kree had prehistoric prototypes. These birds were enormous creatures, who preyed upon mammoths and mastodons, and even upon the great saurians. It has been conclusively proved that a few saurians have been killed by the ancestors of the kree, but the favourite food of these birds was undoubtedly the Thermosaurus. It is believed that the kree attacked the eyes of the Thermosaurus and when, as was its habit, the mammoth creature turned on its back to claw them, they fell upon the thinner scales of its stomach armour and finally killed it. This, of course, is a theory, but we have almost absolute proofs of its correctness. Now, these two birds are known among scientists as the ekaf-bird and the ool-yllik. The names are Australian, in which country most of their remains have been unearthed. They lived during the Carboniferous period. Now it is not generally known, but the fact is, that in 1801 Captain Ransom, of the British exploring vessel Gull, purchased from the natives of Tasmania the skin of an ekaf-bird that could not have been killed more than twenty-four hours previous to its sale. I saw this skin in the British Museum. It was labelled “unknown bird, probably extinct.” It took me exactly a week to satisfy myself that it was actually the skin of an ekaf-bird. But that is not all, Dick, my boy,” continued the professor excitedly. “In 1854, Admiral Stuart, of our own navy, saw the carcass of a strange gigantic bird floating along the southern coast of Australia. Sharks were after it, and, before a boat could be lowered, these miserable fish got it. But the good old admiral secured a few feathers and sent them to the Smithsonian. I saw them. They were not even labelled, but I knew that they were feathers from the ekaf-bird or its near relative, the ool-yllik.”

I had grown so interested that I had leaned far across the table. Daisy, too, bent forward. It was only when the professor paused for a moment that I noticed how close together our heads were—Daisy's and mine. I don't think she realized it. She did not move.

"Now comes the important part of this long discourse," said the professor, smiling at our eagerness. "Ever since the carcass of our derelict Thermosaurus was first noticed, every captain who has seen it has also reported the presence of one or more gigantic birds in the neighbourhood. These birds, at a great distance, appeared to be hovering over the carcass, but on the approach of a vessel they disappeared. Even in midocean they were observed. When I heard about it I was puzzled. A month later I was satisfied that neither the ekaf-bird nor the ool-yllik was extinct. Last Monday I knew that I was right. I found forty-eight distinct impressions of the huge seven-toed claw of the ekaf-bird on the beach here at Pine Inlet. You may imagine my excitement. I succeeded in digging up enough wet sand around one of these impressions to preserve its form. I managed to get it into a soap box, and now it is there in my shop. The tide rose too rapidly for me to save the other footprints."

I shuddered at the possibility of a clumsy misstep on my part obliterating the impression of an ool-yllik.

"That is the reason that my daughter warned you off the beach," he said mildly.

"Hanging would have been too good for the vandal who destroyed such priceless prizes!" I cried out in self-reproach.

Daisy Holroyd turned a flushed face to mine, and impulsively laid her hand on my sleeve.

"How could you know?" she said.

"It's all right now," said her father, emphasizing each word with a gentle tap of his pipe-bowl on the table edge; don't be hard on yourself, Dick, my boy. You'll do yeoman's service yet."

It was nearly midnight, and still we chatted on about the Thermosaurus, the ekaf-bird, and the ool-yllik, eagerly discussing the probability of the great reptile's carcass being in the vicinity. That alone seemed to explain the presence of these prehistoric birds at Pine Inlet.

"Do they ever attack human beings?" I asked.

The professor looked startled.

"Gracious!" he exclaimed, "I never thought of that. And Daisy running about out of doors! Dear me! it takes a scientist to be an unnatural parent!"

His alarm was half real, half assumed; but all the same, he glanced gravely at us both, shaking his handsome head, absorbed in thought. Daisy herself looked a little doubtful. As for me, my sensations were distinctly queer.

"It is true," said the professor, frowning at the wall, "that human remains have been found associated with the bones of the ekaf-bird—I don't know how intimately. It is a matter to be taken into most serious consideration."

"The problem can be solved," said I, "in several ways. One is, to keep Miss Holroyd in the house—"

"I shall not stay in!" cried Daisy indignantly.

We all laughed, and her father assured her that she should not be abused.

"Even if I did stay in," she said, "one of these birds might alight on Master Dick."

She looked saucily at me as she spoke, but turned crimson when her father observed quietly, "You don't seem to think of me, Daisy."

"Of course I do," she said, getting up and putting both arms around her father's neck; "but Dick—as—as you call him—is so helpless and timid."

My blissful smile froze on my lips.

“Timid!” I repeated.

She came back to the table, making me a mocking reverence.

“Do you think I am to be laughed at with impunity?” she said.

“What are your other plans, Dick, my boy?” asked the professor.—“Daisy, let him alone, you little tease!”

“One is, to haul a lot of cast-iron boilers along the dunes,” I said. “If these birds come when the carcass floats in, and if they seem disposed to trouble us, we could crawl into the boilers and be safe.”

“Why, that is really brilliant!” cried Daisy.

“Be quiet, my child! Dick, the plan is sound and sensible and perfectly practical. Mc-Peck and Frisby shall go for a dozen loads of boilers to-morrow.”

“It will spoil the beauty of the landscape,” said Daisy, with a taunting nod to me.

“And Frisby will probably attempt to cover them with bill-posters,” I added, laughing.

“That,” said Daisy, “I shall prevent, even at the cost of my life.” And she stood up, looking very determined.

“Children, children,” protested the professor, “go to bed—you bother me.”

Then I turned deliberately to Miss Holroyd.

“Good-night, Daisy,” I said.

“Good-night, Dick,” she said, very gently.

V.

The week passed quickly for me, leaving but few definite impressions. As I look back to it now I can see the long stretch of beach burning in the fierce sunlight, the endless meadows, with the glimmer of water in the distance, the dunes, the twisted cedars, the leagues of scintillating ocean, rocking, rocking, always rocking. In the starlit nights the curlew came in from the sand-bars by twos and threes; I could hear their faint call as I lay in bed thinking. All day long the little ring-necks whistled from the shore. The plover answered them from distant lonely inland pools. The great white gulls drifted like feathers upon the sea.

One morning, toward the end of the week, I, strolling along the dunes, came upon Frisby. He was bill-posting. I caught him red-handed.

“This,” said I, “must stop. Do you understand, Mr. Frisby?”

He stepped back from his work, laying his head on one side, considering first me, then the bill that he had pasted on one of our big boilers.

“Don’t like the colour?” he asked. “It goes well on them boilers.”

“Colour! No, I don’t like the colour either. Can’t you understand that there are some people in the world who object to seeing patent-medicine advertisements scattered over a landscape?”

“Hey?” he said perplexed.

“Will you kindly remove that advertisement?” I persisted.

“Too late,” said Frisby; “it’s sot.”

I was too disgusted to speak, but my disgust turned to anger when I perceived that, as far as the eye could reach, our boilers, lying from three to four hundred feet apart, were ablaze with yellow and red posters, extolling the “Eureka Liver Pill Company.”

“It don’t cost ’em nothin’,” said Frisby cheerfully; “I done it fur the fun of it. Purty, ain’t it?”

“They are Professor Holroyd’s boilers,” I said, subduing a desire to beat Frisby with my telescope. “Wait until Miss Holroyd sees this work.”

“Don’t she like yellor and red?” he demanded anxiously.

“You’ll find out,” said I.

Frisby gaped at his handiwork and then at his yellow dog. After a moment he mechanically spat on a clamshell and requested Davy to “sic” it.

“Can’t you comprehend that you have ruined our pleasure in the landscape?” I asked more mildly.

“I’ve got some green bills,” said Frisby; “I kin stick ’em over the yellor ones—”

“Confound it!” said I, “it isn’t the colour!”

“Then,” observed Frisby, “you don’t like them pills. I’ve got some bills of the ‘Cropper Bicycle,’ and a few of ‘Bagley, the Gents’ Tailor—’ ”

“Frisby,” said I, “use them all—paste the whole collection over your dog and yourself—then walk off the cliff.”

He sullenly unfolded a green poster, swabbed the boiler with paste, laid the upper section of the bill upon it, and plastered the whole bill down with a thwack of his brush. As I walked away I heard him muttering.

Next day Daisy was so horrified that I promised to give Frisby an ultimatum. I found him with Freda, gazing sentimentally at his work, and I sent him back to the shop in a hurry, telling Freda at the same time that she could spend her leisure in providing Mr. Frisby with sand, soap, and a scrubbing brush. Then I walked on to my post of observation.

I watched until sunset. Daisy came with her father to hear my report, but there was nothing to tell, and we three walked slowly back to the house.

In the evenings the professor worked on his volumes, the click of his type-writer sounding faintly behind his closed door. Daisy and I played chess sometimes; sometimes we played hearts. I don’t remember that we ever finished a game of either—we talked too much.

Our discussions covered every topic of interest: we argued upon politics; we skimmed over literature and music; we settled international differences; we spoke vaguely of human brotherhood. I say we slighted no subject of interest—I am wrong; we never spoke of love.

Now, love is a matter of interest to ten people out of ten. Why it was that it did not appear to interest us is as interesting a question as love itself. We were young, alert, enthusiastic, inquiring. We eagerly absorbed theories concerning any curious phenomena in Nature, as intellectual cocktails to stimulate discussion. And yet we did not discuss love. I do not say that we avoided it. No; the subject was too completely ignored for even that. And yet we found it very difficult to pass an hour separated. The professor noticed this, and laughed at us. We were not even embarrassed.

Sunday passed in pious contemplation of the ocean. Daisy read a little in her prayer-book, and the professor threw a cloth over his typewriter and strolled up and down the sands. He may have been lost in devout abstraction; he may have been looking for footprints. As for me, my mind was very serene, and I was more than happy. Daisy read to me a little for my soul’s sake, and the professor came up and said something cheerful. He also examined the magazine of my Winchester.

That night, too, Daisy took her guitar to the sands and sang one or two Armenian hymns. Unlike us, the Armenians do not take their pleasures sadly. One of their pleasures is evidently religion.

The big moon came up over the dunes and stared at the sea until the surface of every wave trembled with radiance. A sudden stillness fell across the world; the wind died out; the foam ran noiselessly across the beach; the cricket’s rune was stilled.

I leaned back, dropping one hand upon the sand. It touched another hand, soft and cool.

After a while the other hand moved slightly, and I found that my own had closed above it. Presently one finger stirred a little—only a little—for our fingers were interlocked.

On the shore the foam-froth bubbled and winked and glimmered in the moonlight. A star fell from the zenith, showering the night with incandescent dust.

If our fingers lay interlaced beside us, her eyes were calm and serene as always, wide open, fixed upon the depths of a dark sky. And when her father rose and spoke to us, she did not withdraw her hand.

“Is it late?” she asked dreamily.

“It is midnight, little daughter.”

I stood up, still holding her hand, and aided her to rise. And when, at the door, I said good-night, she turned and looked at me for a little while in silence, then passed into her room slowly, with head still turned toward me.

All night long I dreamed of her; and when the east whitened, I sprang up, the thunder of the ocean in my ears, the strong sea wind blowing into the open window.

“She is asleep,” I thought, and I leaned from the window and peered out into the east.

The sea called to me, tossing its thousand arms; the soaring gulls, dipping, rising, wheel-lug above the sand-bar, screamed and clamoured for a playmate. I slipped into my bathing suit, dropped from the window upon the soft sand, and in a moment had plunged head foremost into the surf, swimming beneath the waves toward the open sea.

Under the tossing ocean the voice of the waters was in my ears—a low, sweet voice, intimate, mysterious. Through singing foam and broad, green, glassy depths, by whispering sandy channels atrail with seaweed, and on, on, out into the vague, cool sea, I sped, rising to the top, sinking, gliding. Then at last I flung myself out of water, hands raised, and the clamour of the gulls filled my ears.

As I lay, breathing fast, drifting on the sea, far out beyond the gulls I saw a flash of white, and an arm was lifted, signalling me.

“Daisy!” I called.

A clear hail came across the water, distinct on the sea wind, and at the same instant we raised our hands and moved toward each other.

How we laughed as we met in the sea! The white dawn came up out of the depths, the zenith turned to rose and ashes.

And with the dawn came the wind—a great sea wind, fresh, aromatic, that hurled our voices back into our throats and lifted the sheeted spray above our heads. Every wave, crowned with mist, caught us in a cool embrace, cradled us, and slipped away, only to leave us to another wave, higher, stronger, crested with opalescent glory, breathing incense.

We turned together up the coast, swimming lightly side by side, but our words were caught up by the winds and whirled into the sky.

We looked up at the driving clouds; we looked out upon the pallid waste of waters; but it was into each other’s eyes we looked, wondering, wistful, questioning the reason of sky and sea. And there in each other’s eyes we read the mystery, and we knew that earth and sky and sea were created for us alone.

Drifting on by distant sands and dunes, her white fingers touching mine, we spoke, keying our tones to the wind’s vast harmony. And we spoke of love.

Gray and wide as the limitless span of the sky and the sea, the winds gathered from the world’s ends to bear us on; but they were not familiar winds; for now, along the coast, the breakers

curled and showed a million fangs, and the ocean stirred to its depths, uneasy, ominous, and the menace of its murmur drew us closer as we moved.

Where the dull thunder and the tossing spray warned us from sunken reefs, we heard the harsh challenges of gulls; where the pallid surf twisted in yellow coils of spume above the bar, the singing sands murmured of treachery and secrets of lost souls agasp in the throes of silent undertows.

But there was a little stretch of beach glimmering through the mountains of water, and toward this we turned, side by side. Around us the water grew warmer; the breath of the following waves moistened our cheeks; the water itself grew gray and strange about us.

“We have come too far,” I said; but she only answered: “Faster, faster! I am afraid!” The water was almost hot now; its aromatic odour filled our lungs.

“The Gulf loop!” I muttered. “Daisy, shall I help you?”

“No. Swim—close by me! Oh-h! Dick—”

Her startled cry was echoed by another—a shrill scream, unutterably horrible—and a great bird flapped from the beach, splashing and beating its pinions across the water with a thundering noise.

Out across the waves it blundered, rising little by little from the water, and now, to my horror, I saw another monstrous bird swinging in the air above it, squealing as it turned on its vast wings. Before I could speak we touched the beach, and I half lifted her to the shore.

“Quick!” I repeated. “We must not wait.”

Her eyes were dark with fear, but she rested a hand on my shoulder, and we crept up among the dune grasses and sank down by the point of sand where the rough shelter stood, surrounded by the iron-ringed piles.

She lay there, breathing fast and deep, dripping with spray. I had no power of speech left, but when I rose wearily to my knees and looked out upon the water my blood ran cold. Above the ocean, on the breast of the roaring wind, three enormous birds sailed, turning and wheeling among each other; and below, drifting with the gray stream of the Gulf loop, a colossal bulk lay half submerged—a gigantic lizard, floating belly upward.

Then Daisy crept kneeling to my side and touched me, trembling from head to foot.

“I know,” I muttered. “I must run back for the rifle.”

“And—and leave me?”

I took her by the hand, and we dragged ourselves through the wire grass to the open end of a boiler lying in the sand.

She crept in on her hands and knees, and called to me to follow.

“You are safe now,” I cried. “I must go back for the rifle.”

“The birds may—may attack you.”

“If they do I can get into one of the other boilers,” I said. “Daisy, you must not venture out until I come back. You won’t, will you?”

“No-o,” she whispered doubtfully.

“Then—good-by.”

“Good-by,” she answered, but her voice was very small and still.

“Good-by,” I said again. I was kneeling at the mouth of the big iron tunnel; it was dark inside and I could not see her, but, before I was conscious of it, her arms were around my neck and we had kissed each other.

I don’t remember how I went away. When I came to my proper senses I was swimming along the coast at full speed, and over my head wheeled one of the birds, screaming at every turn.

The intoxication of that innocent embrace, the close impress of her arms around my neck, gave me a strength and recklessness that neither fear nor fatigue could subdue. The bird above me did not even frighten me; I watched it over my shoulder, swimming strongly, with the tide now aiding me, now stemming my course; but I saw the shore passing quickly and my strength increased, and I shouted when I came in sight of the house, and scrambled up on the sand, dripping and excited. There was nobody in sight, and I gave a last glance up into the air where the bird wheeled, still screeching, and hastened into the house. Freda stared at me in amazement as I seized the rifle and shouted for the professor.

“He has just gone to town, with Captain McPeck in his wagon,” stammered Freda.

“What!” I cried. “Does he know where his daughter is?”

“Miss Holroyd is asleep—not?” gasped Freda.

“Where’s Frisby?” I cried impatiently.

“Yimmie?” quavered Freda.

“Yes, Jimmie; isn’t there anybody here? Good heavens! where’s that man in the shop?”

“He also iss gone,” said Freda, shedding tears, “to buy papier-mâché. Yimmie, he iss gone to post bills.”

I waited to hear no more, but swung my rifle over my shoulder, and, hanging the cartridge belt across my chest, hurried out and up the beach. The bird was not in sight.

I had been running for perhaps a minute when, far up on the dunes, I saw a yellow dog rush madly through a clump of sweet bay, and at the same moment a bird soared past, rose, and hung hovering just above the thicket. Suddenly the bird swooped; there was a shriek and a yelp from the cur, but the bird gripped it in one claw and beat its wings upon the sand, striving to rise. Then I saw Frisby—paste, bucket, and brush raised—fall upon the bird, yelling lustily. The fierce creature relaxed its talons, and the dog rushed on, squeaking with terror. The bird turned on Frisby and sent him sprawling on his face, a sticky mass of paste and sand. But this did not end the struggle. The bird, croaking wildly, flew at the prostrate billposter, and the sand whirled into a pillar above its terrible wings. Scarcely knowing what I was about, I raised my rifle and fired twice. A horrid scream echoed each shot, and the bird rose heavily in a shower of sand; but two bullets were embedded in that mass of foul feathers, and I saw the wires and scarlet tape uncoiling on the sand at my feet. In an instant I seized them and passed the ends around a cedar tree, hooking the clasps tight. Then I cast one swift glance upward, where the bird wheeled screeching, anchored like a kite to the pallium wires; and I hurried on across the dunes, the shells cutting my feet, and the bushes tearing my wet swimming suit, until I dripped with blood from shoulder to ankle. Out in the ocean the carcass of the Thermosaurus floated, claws outspread, belly glistening in the gray light, and over him circled two birds. As I reached the shelter I knelt and fired into the mass of scales, and at my first shot a horrible thing occurred: the lizardlike head writhed, the slitted yellow eyes sliding open from the film that covered them. A shudder passed across the undulating body, the great scaled belly heaved, and one leg feebly clawed at the air.

The thing was still alive!

Crushing back the horror that almost paralyzed my hands, I planted shot after shot into the quivering reptile, while it writhed and clawed, striving to turn over and dive; and at each shot the black blood spurted in long, slim jets across the water. And now Daisy was at my side, pale and determined, swiftly clasping each tape-marked wire to the iron rings in the circle around us. Twice I filled the magazine from my belt, and twice I poured streams of steel-tipped bullets into the scaled mass, twisting and shuddering on the sea. Suddenly the birds steered toward us. I felt

the wind from their vast wings. I saw the feathers erect, vibrating. I saw the spread claws outstretched, and I struck furiously at them, crying to Daisy to run into the iron shelter. Backing, swinging my clubbed rifle, I retreated, but I tripped across one of the taut pallium wires, and in an instant the hideous birds were on me, and the bone in my forearm snapped like a pipestem at a blow from their wings. Twice I struggled to my knees, blinded with blood, confused, almost fainting; then I fell again, rolling into the mouth of the iron boiler.

When I struggled back to consciousness Daisy knelt silently beside me, while Captain McPeek and Professor Holroyd bound up my shattered arm, talking excitedly. The pain made me faint and dizzy. I tried to speak and could not. At last they got me to my feet and into the wagon, and Daisy came, too, and crouched beside me, wrapped in oilskins to her eyes. Fatigue, lack of food, and excitement had combined with wounds and broken bones to extinguish the last atom of strength in my body; but my mind was clear enough to understand that the trouble was over and the Thermosaurus safe.

I heard McPeek say that one of the birds that I had anchored to a cedar tree had torn loose from the bullets and winged its way heavily out to sea. The professor answered: "Yes, the ekaf-bird; the others were ool-ylliks. I'd have given my right arm to have secured them." Then for a time I heard no more; but the jolting of the wagon over the dunes roused me to keenest pain, and I held out my right hand to Daisy. She clasped it in both of hers, and kissed it again and again.

* * *

There is little more to add, I think. Professor Bruce Stoddard has edited this story carefully. His own scientific pamphlet will be published soon, to be followed by Professor Holroyd's sixteen volumes. In a few days the stuffed and mounted Thermosaurus will be placed on free public exhibition in the arena of Madison Square Garden, the only building in the city large enough to contain the body of this immense winged reptile.

When my arm came out of splints, Daisy and I—But really that has nothing to do with a detailed scientific description of the Thermosaurus, which, I think, I shall add as an appendix to the book. If you do not find it there it will be because Daisy and I have very little time to write about Thermosaurians.

But what I really want to tell you about is the extraordinary adventures of Captain McPeek and Frisby—how they produced a specimen of *Samia Cynthia* that dwarfed a hundred of *Attacus Atlas*, and how the American line steamer *St. Louis* fouled the thing with her screw.

The more I think of it the more determined I am to tell it to you. It will be difficult to prevent me. And that is not fiction either.