

new, something original, Mr. Merton?" she asked sarcastically. Then with a withering glance from her brown eyes and a scathing "good evening," she turned on her heel and left him.

It was the last time they had spoken. He was beginning to wonder what kind of a lover she was looking for when he caught a glimpse of her as she emerged from the shrubbery about fifty feet ahead of him, her short, full skirt and high leggings permitting a free stride over the tropical impedimenta.

"Deucedly fine girl!" he muttered aloud. "Muscular as a man and yet as graceful as an angel! It must be the drawing-room veneer that she despises, but would she have a man a boor in civilized society?"

He glanced at his hands; they were white and shapely. He had never done hard work, for, being rich, he had not been obliged to.

Surreptitiously he felt his muscles, his biceps and over the torso. All soft and flabby, and still he was a well-built fellow.

Being sure that she could see him, he drew a small mirror from his pocket and scrutinized his features.

There was the smooth chin, the white teeth, the closely cropped mustache and properly cut hair of a gentleman. What else could she want? If she had condescended to talk with him she would have found him well read. He had traveled extensively, moreover, and could be vastly entertaining.

It nettled him to be the object of such supreme contempt, merely because he had tried to treat her as he had treated dozens of other women whom he had met in society drawing-rooms, on yachts and shipboard.

Furthermore, there were the stories he had about her—each contradicted in the next issue of the paper, to be sure, but just queer enough not to be forgotten.

And just here he was conscious of a big surprise—a tropical shower was coming up and it was likely to "ram guns" in a minute.

He was startled at first. As he dreaded a wetting for Miss Ardsley, but his wits reacted instantly and he almost hugged himself with pleasure. If it thundered and lightened would Her Highness be alarmed, and would it force her to seek his aid and speak to him civilly?

He stared after her over the low, tangled bushes. She had noticed the clouds, evidently, and was making her way through the confusion, tearing apart flowering vines, as she headed for a clump of palms, whose overlapping leaves seemed to promise protection.

He would have to go there also if he did not wish to get wet, but in the spirit of bravado he decided to take the drenching if only to show her that he was not a mollycoddle.

When the rain came it came in torrents, and in spite of his delight over Miss Ardsley's dilemma, he began casting glances over the ocean to see if there was a boat coming.

Strangely enough, the small craft had all disappeared—his own boat was lost sight of long ago—the sea had swallowed them all, apparently.

The natives knew enough to go in when it rained, if they did not know much else—and they had no raiment to spoil, either—certainly a New York crew on a New York yacht would be equally prudent. There was not much prospect of being rescued right away—he could hardly see the next island for the space of five minutes.

When it was over he was soaked to the skin and was sure the palms had not saved Miss Ardsley, but he only paced back and forth on the strip of sand, avoiding the dripping branches.

He had the best of her there; he would dry off and she would not—that is, unless she came out in the sun as soon as the shower was over.

But the sky cleared, the rain stopped and the sun broiled out red hot again and her head was not raised from the shrubs. As he spread his outer garments on the sand to dry them, and incidentally get the rays as near as possible to his skin, he was strongly tempted to call to her, but he choked back the desire and began to whistle.

The pearly twilight would come trailing along after a time and with it the pangs of hunger. As the thought dawned on him Merton began a search for whatever might be edible on the island.

He skimmed the circumference after a few wild scrambles and discovered nothing but a few luscious berries. These he put in a cup-shaped leaf and carried them carefully, and at last was able to add a few pomegranates.

Was Miss Ardsley hungry? If she was, why didn't she come out of her hiding place and say so? Would she suffer rather than ask him to forage for her?

His blood boiled at the thought, and acting on impulse he sat down and devoured his collection.

He was conscious right here of something lacking in his program. The boat had not picked up and the rescuers were not coming. It was getting late and would soon be evening. That was all right so far, but was there not something that he should do to force Miss Ardsley's recognition of his existence?

Sitting on the shore and whistling all night, while she hid herself in the bushes like a toad, did not seem to him to be especially clever.

If he only knew just how daring she was he would try to shock her into admiration by some adventurous, even reckless maneuver.

He would begin by striding boldly into her presence, and chasing her if she ran from him. It would be ungentlemanly, but it would make her notice him—a thing which courtesy had failed to do for over a week on the yacht.

His soliloquy ended and he stared fixedly at the water. There was something bobbing up now and then above the little ripples made by the storm, and whatever it was it was headed for the island.

While he waited, not knowing whether the thing was brute or human, there was a rustling in the shrubbery and Miss Ardsley, not quite as wet as he was, stepped out on the sand beside him.

Merton had to admit that wetness did not seem to disturb her equanimity nor destroy her beauty. She had discarded her straw hat, presumably because it was rain-soaked, and her hair, instead of getting stringy, was curling about her temples even higher than ever. He had never seen her look more bewitching than she did at this minute.

She had been the object, too, apparently, and come down to inspect it, but as ever, while he glanced at her expectantly, she utterly ignored him.

The black thing in the water resolved itself into a head, a black body followed it and in time a native, garbed in nature's simple costume, waded slowly to the island's edge, shaking himself like a dog and signing to them.



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