

PIECES EIGHT

BEING THE AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE OF A TREASURE DISCOVERED IN THE BAHAMA ISLANDS IN THE YEAR 1903—NOW FIRST GIVEN TO THE PUBLIC.

Richard Le Gallienne

CHAPTER III.

In Which I Am Afforded Glimpses Into Futurity—Possibly Useful.

Two or three evenings before we were due to sail, at one of our sully conversations, I put the question whether anyone had ever tried the divining rod for treasure in the islands.

Old John nodded and said he knew the man I wanted, a half-crazy old negro back there in Grant's Town—the negro quarter spreading out into the brush behind the ridge on which the town of Nassau proper is built.

"He calls himself a 'king,'" he added, "and the natives do, I believe, regard him as the head of a certain tribe. The lads call him 'Old King Coffee'—a memory I suppose of the Ashantee war. Anyone will tell you where he lives. He has a name as a preacher—among the Holy Jumpers—but he's getting too old to do much preaching nowadays. Go and see him for fun anyway."

So next morning I went. I had hardly been prepared for the plunge into "Darkest Africa" which I found myself taking, as, leaving Government house behind, perched on the crest of its white ridge, I walked a few yards inland and entered a region which, for all its green palms, made a similar sudden impression of pervading blackness on the mind which one gets on suddenly entering a coal-mining district after traveling through fields and meadows.

There were far more blacks than whites down on Bay street, but here there were nothing but blacks on every side.

The roads ran in every direction, and along them everywhere were figures of black women shuffling with burdens on their heads, or groups of girls, anticlimactically merry, most of them bonny, here and there almost a beauty. There were churches and dance halls and saloons—all radiating, so to say, a prosperous blackness.

At first the effect of the whole scene was a little sinister, even a little frightening. The strangeness of African jungle, was here, and one was a white man in it all alone among grinning savage faces. But for the figures about one being clothed, the illusion had been complete; and for that and the kind-hearted salutations from comely white-turbaned nannies which soon sprang up about me, and the groups of effish children that laughingly blocked one's progress with requests—not in any weird African dialect but in excellent English—for "a copper, please."

This request was not above the suddenly dignified of quite big and buxomesses. One of these, a really superb young creature, asked for "a copper, please," but with a sassy coquetry belittling her adolescence.

"I'll give you one if you'll tell me where the 'king' lives," said I. "Ole King Coffee?" she asked, and then fell into a very agony of negro laughter. Recovering, she put her finger to her lips, suggesting silence, and said:

"Come along, I'll show you!" And walking by my side, little as a young animal, she had soon brought me to a cabin much like the rest, though perhaps a little poorer looking.

"Sh! There he is!" and she shook all over again with suppressed giggles. I gave her a sixpence and told her to be a good girl. Then I advanced up a little strip of garden to where I had caught a glimpse of a venerable white-haired negro seated at the window, as if for exhibition, with a great open book in his hands. This he ap-

peared to be reading with great solemnity, through enormous goggles, though I thought I caught a side-glint of his eye, as though he had taken a swift reconnoitering glance in my direction—a glance which apparently had but deepened his attention and increased the dignity of his demeanor. Remembering that he was not merely royal but pious also, I made my salutation at once courteous-like and sanctimonious.

"Good day to your majesty," I said; "God's good, God looks after his servants."

"De Lord is merciful," he answered gravely; "God takes care of his children. Be seated, sar, and please excuse my not rising; my rheumatism is a sore affliction to me."

I was not long in getting to the subject of my visit. The old man listened to me with great composure, but with a marked accession of mysterious importance in his manner.

"It's his, sar," he said, when I had finished, "I could find it for you. I could find it for you, sure enough; and I'm de only man in all de islands dat could. But I should have to go wid you, and it's de Lord's will to keep me here in dis chair wid rheumatism. De rods has turned in dese old hands many a time, and I have faith in de Lord dey would turn again—yes, I'd find it for you; sure enough. I'd find it if any man could—and it was de Lord's will. But maybe I can see it for you widout moving from dis chair."

"Do you mean, brother, that the Lord has given you second sight?" "Dat am it! Glory to his name, hal-luh-luh!" he answered. "I look in a glass ball—so; and if de spirit helps me I can see clear as a picture far under de ground—far, far away over de sea. It's de Lord's truth, sar—blessed be his name!"

I asked him whether he would look into his crystal for me. With a burst of profanity, as unexpected as it was vivid, he cursed "dem boys" that had stolen from him a priceless crystal which once had belonged to his old royal mother, who, before him, had had the same gift of the spirit. But, he added—turning to a table by his side, and lifting from it a large crystal decanter of considerable capacity, though at present void of contents—that he had found that gazing into the large glass ball of his stopper produced almost equally good results at times.

First he asked me to be kind enough to shut the door.

We had to be very quiet, he declared; the spirit could work only in deep silence. And he asked me to be kind enough to close my eyes. Then I heard his voice muttering in a strange tongue, a queer dark gobbling kind of words, which may have been ancient African spell-words, or sheer gibberish such as musicians in all times and places have employed to mystify their consultants.

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I looked at him through the corner of my eye—as doubtless he had anticipated, for he was glaring with an air of inspired abstraction into the ball of the decanter stopper. So we sat silent for I suppose some ten minutes. Then I heard him give another deep sigh. Opening my eyes I saw him slowly shaking his head.

"De spirits don't seem communicable dis afternoon," he muttered tilting the decanter slightly on one side and observing it dreadingly.

"Do you think, your majesty," I asked with as serious a face as I could assume, "the spirits might work better—if the decanter were to be tilted?"

"Maybe, sar; maybe. Spirits is curious things; dey need inspiration sometimes, just like ourselves."

"What kind of inspiration do you think gets the best results, your majesty?"

"Well, sar, I can't say as dey is very particular, but I've noticed dey do seem powerful 'tached to just plain good ole Jamaica rum."

"They shall have it," I said.

I had noticed that there was a saloon a few yards away, so before many more minutes had passed I had been there and come back again, and the decanter stood ruddily filled, ready for the resumption of our seance. But before we began I of course accepted the seer's invitation to join him and the spirits in a friendly libation.

Then—I having closed my eyes—we began again, and it was astonishing with what rapidity the thick-coming pictures began to crowd upon that inner vision with which the Lord had endowed his faithful follower!

Of course I was inclined now to take the whole thing as an amusing imposition; but presently, watching his face and the curious "seeing" expression of his eyes, and noting the exactitude of one or two pictures, I began to feel that, however much he might be in-

venting or elaborating, there was some substratum of truth in what he was telling me.

The first pictures that came to him were merely pictures, though astonishingly clear ones, of Webster's boat, the Flamingo, of Webster himself, and of the men and the old dog Sallor; but in all this he might have been visualizing from actual knowledge. Yet the details were curiously exact. Presently his gaze becoming more fixed:

"I see you anchored under a little settlement. You are rowing ashore. There are little pathways running up among de coral rock, and a few white houses. Seems to be a forest; big trees—not like Nassau trees—and thick brush everywhere; all choked up so thick and dark, can't see nut'n. Wait a minute, dough. Dere seems to be old houses all sunk in and los', like old ruins. Can't see dem for de brush. And wait—Lord love you, sar, but I see afraid—I seem to see a big light coming up trough de brush from far under de ground—just like you see old rotten wood shining in de dark—deep, deep down. Didn't I tell you de Lord gave me eyes to see into de bowels of de earth?—it's de bowels of de earth for sure—all lit up and shining. Praise de Lord—it am de gold, for certain, all hidden away and shining dere under de ground—"

"Can't you see it closer, clearer?" I exclaimed involuntarily; "get some idea of the place it's in?" The old man gazed with a renewed intensity.

"No," he said presently, and his disappointed tone seemed to me the best evidence yet of his truth, "I only see a little golden mist deep, deep down under de ground; now it is fading away. It's gone; I can only see de woods and de ruins again."

This brought his visions to an end. The spirits obstinately refused to make any more pictures, though the old man continued to gaze on in the decanter stopper for fully five minutes.

CHAPTER III.

In Which We Take Ship Once More.

The discovery which—through my friend the dealer in "marine curiosities"—I had made, or believed myself to have made, of the situation of Henry P. Tobias's second "pod" of treasure, fitted exactly with Charlie Webster's wishes for our trip, small as he affected to take in it at the moment.

"Short Shift Island" lay a few miles to the northwest of Andros Island. Now Andros is a great haunt of wild duck, not to speak of that more august bird, the flamingo. Attraction number one for the good Charlie. Then, though it is some hundred and fifty miles long and some fifty miles broad at its broadest, it has never yet, it is said, been entirely explored.

Its center is still a mystery. The natives declare it is haunted, or at all events inhabited by some strange people no one has yet approached close enough to see. You can see their houses, they say, from a distance, but as you approach them, they disappear. Here, therefore, seemed an excellent place for Tobias to take cover in, Charlie's duck-shooting preserves, endless marl lakes islanded with mangrove copes, lay on the fringe of this mysterious region. So Andros was plainly marked out for our destination.

Sallor had watched his master getting his guns ready for some days, and, doubtless, memories stirred in him of Scotch moors they had shot over together. He raised his head to the night wind and sniffed impatiently, as though he already scented the wild duck on Andros Island. He was impatient, like the rest of us, because, though it was an hour past sailing-time, we had still to collect two of the crew. The two lovers turned up at last and, all preliminaries being at length disposed of, we threw off the mooring ropes and presently there was heard that most exhilarating of sounds to anyone who loves sailing—the rattling of the ropes through the blocks as our mainmast began to rise up high against the moon which was beginning to look out over the huge block of the Colonial hotel, the sea wall of which ran along as far as our mooring. A few lights in its windows here and there broke the blank darkness of its facade, glimmering through the avenues of royal palms. I am thus explicit because of something that presently happened and which stayed the mainmast in its rippling ascent.

A tall figure was running along the sea wall from the direction of the hotel, calling out, a little breathlessly, in a rich young voice as it ran:

"Wait a minute there, you fellows! Wait a minute!" We were already moving, parallel with the wall, and at least twelve feet away from it, by the time the figure—that of a tall boy, cowboy-hatted and prettily equipped outlined in the half light—stopped just ahead of us. He raised something that looked like a bag in his right hand, calling out "Catch," as he did so; and, a moment after, before a word could be spoken,

he took a flying leap and landed amongst us, plump in the cockpit and was clutching first one of us and then the other, to keep his balance.

"Did it, by Jove!" he exclaimed in a beautiful English accent, and then started laughing as only absurd dare-devil youngsters can.

"Forgive me," he said, as soon as he could get his breath, "but I had to do it. Heaven knows what the old man will say!"

"You're something of a long jump!" said Charlie.

"Oh! I have done my twenty-two and an eighth on a broad running jump, but I had no chance for a run there," answered the lad, carelessly,

for me to tell. I should have to give away a friend."

"I'm sorry, but I shall have to insist," replied Charlie, looking very grim.

"All right, then," answered the youth, looking him straight in the eyes, "put me ashore."

"No; I won't do that now, either," declared Charlie, sternly setting his jaw. "I'll put you in irons, rather—and keep you on bread and water—till you answer my questions."

"You will, eh?" retorted the youth, flashing fire from his fine eyes. And as he spoke, quick as thought, he leaped up on to the gunwale and, without hesitation, dived into the great glassy rollers.

But Charlie was quick, too. Like a flash he grabbed one of the boy's ankles, so that the beautiful dive was spoiled; and there was the boy, hanging by an imprisoned leg over the ship's side, a helpless captive—his arms in the water and his leg struggling to get free. But he might as well have struggled against the grip of Hercules. In another moment Charlie had him hauled aboard again, his eyes full of tears of boyish rage and humiliation.

"You young fool!" exclaimed Charlie. "The water round here is thick with sharks; you wouldn't have gone fifty yards without one of them getting you."

"Sharks?" gasped the boy, contemptuously. "I know more about sharks than you do."

"You seem to know a good many things I don't," said Charlie, whose grinnings had evidently relaxed a little at the lad's display of mettle. Meanwhile, my temper was beginning to rise on behalf of our young passenger.

"I tell you what, Charlie," I interposed; "if you are going to keep this up, you'd better come out on this trip and set us both ashore at West End. You're making a fool of yourself. The lad's all right."

The boy shot me a warm glance of gratitude.

"All right," agreed Charlie, beginning to lose his temper, too. "I'm damned if I don't. And, his hand on the tiller, he made as if to turn the boat about and tack for the shore."

"No! no!" cried the boy, springing between us and appealingly laying one hand on Charlie's shoulder, the other on mine. "You mustn't let me spoil your trip. I'll compromise. And, skipper, I'll tell your friend here all that is to be told—everything—I swear—if you will leave it to his judgment."

"Right-o," agreed Charlie at last; so our passenger and I thereupon withdrew for our conference.



Before a Word Could Be Spoken, He Took a Flying Leap.

"But suppose you'd hit the water instead of the deck?"

"What of it? Can't one swim?"

"I guess you're all right, young man," said Charlie, softened; "but . . . well, we're not taking passengers."

The words had a familiar sound. They were the very ones I had used to Tobias, as he stood with his hand on the gunwale of the Maggie Darling. I rapidly conveyed the coincidence—and the difference—to Charlie. It struck me as odd, I'll admit, that our second start, in this respect, should be so like the first. Meanwhile, the young man was answering, or rather pleading, in a boyish way:

"Don't call me a passenger; I'll help work the boat. I'll tell the truth, I heard—never mind how—about your trip, and I'm just nutty about buried treasure. Come, be a sport. We can let the old guy know, somehow. . . . and it won't kill him to tear his hair for a day or two. He knows I can take care of myself."

"Well," said Charlie, after thinking awhile in his slow way, "we'll think it over. You can come along till the morning. Then I can get a good look at you. If I don't like your looks we'll still be able to put you off at West End; and if I do—well—right-ho! Now, boys," he shouted, "go ahead with the sails."

Once more there was that rippling of the ropes through the blocks, as our mainmast rose up high against the moon and filled proudly with the steady northeast breeze we had been waiting for.

So two or three hours went by, as we plunged on, to the seething sound of the water, and the singing of our sails, and all the various rumor of wind and sea. After all, it was a good music to sleep to and, for all my scorn of sleeping landsemen, an irresistible drowsiness stretched me out on the roof of the little cabin, wondrously rocked into forgetfulness.

My nap came to an end suddenly, as though some one had flung me out through a door of blue and gold into a new-born world. There was the sun rising, the moon still on duty, and the morning star divinely naked in the heaven.

And there was Charlie, his broad face beaming with boyish happiness, and something like a fatherly gentleness in his eyes, as he watched his companion at the tiller, whom, for a half-awakened moment of waking, I couldn't account for, till our start all came back to me, when I realized that it was our young scapegrace of overnight. Charlie and he evidently were on the best of terms already.

Old Tom had been busy with breakfast and soon the smells of coffee and freshly made "Johnny-cake" and frying bacon competed not unsuccessfully with the various fragrances of the morning.

Breakfast over, Charlie filled his pipe, assuming, as he did so, a judicial aspect. I filled mine and our young friend followed suit by taking a silver cigarette case from his pocket and striking a match on the leg of his khaki knickerbockers with a professional air.

"All set?" asked Charlie, and, after a slight pause, he went on:

"Now, young man, you can see we are nearing the end of the island. Another half-mile will bring us to West End. Whether we put you ashore there, or take you along, depends on your answers to my questions."

"Fire away," answered the youth, blowing a cloud of cigarette smoke in a delicate spiral up into the morning sky; "but I've really told you all I have to tell."

"No; you haven't told us how you came to know of our trip, what we were supposed to be after, and when we were starting."

"That's true!" flushed the lad, momentarily losing his composure. Then, partly regaining it: "Is it necessary to answer that question?"

"Absolutely," answered Charlie, beginning to look really serious.

"Because, if you don't mind . . . well, I'd just as soon not."

"For that very reason I want to know. We are out on a more serious business than perhaps you realize, and your answer may mean more to us than you think."

"I'm sure it cannot be of such importance to you. Really, it's hardly fair

let something slip involuntarily.

"Ho! ho! young man," cried Charlie, his face darkening again, "what do you know about High Cay? I thought this was your first trip."

"So it is," answered the boy, "on the sea."

"What do you mean: 'on the sea?'"

"I mean that I've done it many a time—on the chart. I know every bluff and reef and shoal and cay around Andros from Morgan's Bluff to Washington's Cut—"

"You do, eh?"

"On the chart. Why, I've studied charts since I was a kid, and gone every kind of voyage you can think of—playing at buccaneering or whaling, or discovering the north pole. Every kid does that."

"They do, eh?" said Charlie, evidently quite unimpressed. "I never did."

"That's because you've about as much imagination as a turnip in that head of yours," I broke in, in defense of my young Apollo.

"Maybe, if you're so smart," continued Charlie, paying no attention to me, "you can navigate us through the North Bight?"

"Maybe!" answered our youngest party, with an odd little smile. He had evidently recovered his nerve, and seemed to take pleasure in piquing Charlie's suspicions.

CHAPTER IV.

In Which We Enter the Wilderness.

Andros, as no other of the islands, is surrounded by a ring of reefs stretching all around its coasts. We were inside the breakwater of the reefs and the rolling swell of ocean gave way at once to a lullpond calmness. We were at the entrance of North Bight, one of the three bights which, dotted, with numerous low-lying cays, breaks up Andros island in the middle and allows a passage through a maze-like archipelago direct to the northwest end of Cuba. Here on the northwest shore is a small and very lonely settlement—one of the two or three settlements on the else-deserted island—Behring's point.

Here we dropped anchor and Charlie, who had some business ashore, proposed our landing with him; but here again our passenger aroused his suspicions—though Heaven knows why—by preferring to remain aboard.

"Please let me off," he requested in his most top-lofty English accent. "You can see for yourself that there's nothing of interest—nothing but a bensly lot of nigger cabins, and dirty coral rock that will cut your boots to pieces. I'd much rather smoke and wait for you in peace," and, taking out his case and lighting a cigarette, he waved it gaily to us as we roved off.

He had certainly been right about Behring's point—Charlie was absurdly certain that he had known it before, and had some reason for not landing—for a more torrid and poverty-stricken foothold of humanity could hardly be conceived; a poor little cluster of negro cabins, indeed, scrubbing up from the beach, and with no streets but crazy pathways in and out among the gray clinker-like coral.

But it was touching to find even here that, though the whole worldly goods of the community would scarcely have fetched ten dollars, the souls of men were still held worth caring for; for presently we came upon a pretty little church, with a schoolhouse near by, while from the roof of an adjacent building we were hailed by a pleasant-faced white man, busy with some shingling.

It was the good priest of the little place, Father Serapion, disguised in overalls and the honest grime of his labor; like a true Benedictine, praying with his strong and skillful hands.

Father Serapion and Charlie were old friends, and Charlie took occasion to confide in him with regard to Tobias, and, to his huge delight, discovered that a man answering very closely to his description had dropped in there with a large sponger two days before. He had only stopped long enough to buy rum at the little store near the landing and had been off again through the night, sailing west.

Father Serapion, who knew Charlie Webster's shooting ground, promised to send a swift messenger should anything further of interest to us come to his knowledge within the next week or so.

Then we sailed away from Behring's point, due west through the North Bight. Morning found us sailing through a maze of low-lying desert islands of a bewildering sameness of shape and size, and with practically nothing to distinguish one from another.

We had hoped to reach our camp, out on the other side of the island, that evening; but that dodging the shoals and sticking in the mud had considerably delayed us. Besides, though Charlie and the captain both hated to admit it, we had lost our way. So night began to fall and, as there is no sailing in such waters at night, we once more cast anchor under a gloomy, black shape of land, exceedingly lonesome and forgotten-looking, which we agreed to call "Little Wood Cay"—till morning.

Soon all were asleep except Sallor and me. I lay awake for a long time watching the square yard of stars that shone down through the hatch in our cabin ceiling like a little window looking into eternity, while the waters lapped and lapped outside, and the night talked strangely to itself. Next morning Charlie and the captain were forced to own up that the island, discovered to the day, was not Little Wood Cay. No humiliation goes deeper with a sailing man than having to ask his way. Besides, who was there to ask in that solitude? Doubtless a cormorant flying overhead knew it, but no one thought to ask him.

However, we were in luck, for, after sailing about a bit, we came upon two

lonely negroes standing up in their boats and thrusting long poles into the

water. They were sponging—most melancholy of occupations—and they looked forlorn enough in the still dawn. But they had a smile for our plight. It was evidently a good joke to have mistaken Sapodilla cay for Little Wood Cay. Of course we should have gone—so. And "so" we presently went, not without rewarding them for their information with two generous drinks of old Jamaica rum.

One of our reasons for seeking Little Wood Cay, which it proved had been close all the time, was that it is one of the few cays where one can get fresh water. "Good water here," says the chart. We wanted to refill some of our jars, and so we landed there, glad to stretch our legs, while old Tom cooked our breakfast on the beach, under a sapodilla tree.

Now that we knew where we were, it was clear, but by no means carefree sailing to our camp. We were making for what is known as the Wide Opening, a sort of estuary into which a listless stream or two crawl through mangrove bushes from the interior swamps.

Here, a short distance from the bank, on some slightly ascending rocky ground, under the spreading shade of something like a stretch of woodland, Charlie, several years ago, had built a rough log shanty for his camp—one of two or three camps he had thus scattered for himself up and down the "out islands," where nearly all the land is no man's, and so every man's land. The particular camp at which we now arrived he had not visited for a long time.

Here Tom brought us our dinner and the dark began to settle down upon us, thrillingly lonely, and full of strange, desolate cries of night creatures from the mangrove swamps that surrounded our little oasis for miles. Sallor lay at our feet, dreaming of tomorrow's duck. His master's thoughts were evidently in the same direction.

"How are you with a gun?" he asked, turning to the boy.

"Oh, I won't brag. I had better wait till tomorrow. But, of course, you will have to lend me a gun."

"I have a beauty for you—just your weight," replied Charlie, his face beaming as it did only at the thought of his guns, which he kept polished like jewels and guarded as jealously as a violinist his violin, or an Arab his harem.

Dawn was just breaking as I felt Charlie's great paw on my shoulder next morning. He was very serious. For a moment, as I sat up, still half asleep, I thought he had news of Tobias. But it was only duck.

I was scarcely dressed when Tom arrived with breakfast, and in a few minutes we had shouldered our guns and were crossing the half mile of pointy waste that divided us from the inland lakes. Ahead of us, the crew were carrying the shells on their shoulders, and very soon we were each seated in regulation fashion on a canvas chair in front of our respective shells, with our guns across our knees and a negro behind us to do the poling.

Charlie went ahead, with Sallor standing in the bow quivering with excitement. The necessity of absolute silence, of course, had been impressed upon us all by the most severe of all sportsmen. Tom (who was poling me) and I understood that our job, and also that of my companion, was to steal behind one mangrove cove after another till we had got on the other side of a quacking flock of teal—which might then be expected to take flight in Charlie's direction and rush by him in a terrified whirlwind. This not very easy feat of stalking we were able to accomplish, thereby winning Charlie's immense approval and putting him in a splendid temper for the rest of the day; for, as the wild cloud swept over him, he was able to bring down no less than seven. Like a true sportsman, in telling the story afterward in John Saunders' snuggery, he averred that the number was nine!

(Continued Next Saturday.)

The plant of the Oregon Lumber company on Dead Point creek in Hood River county was destroyed by fire last Friday. The loss is \$20,000.

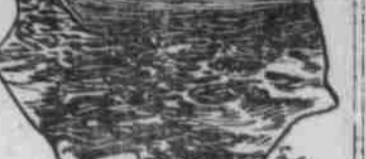
The latest reports from tourists coming from Tillamook and Neah beaches by way of Sheridan state the effect that the roads are truly ally impassable.



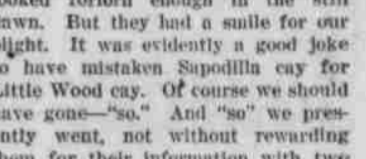
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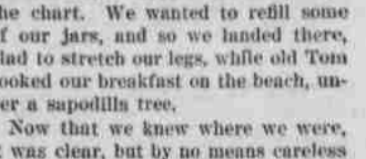
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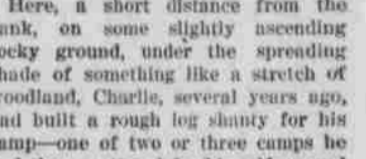
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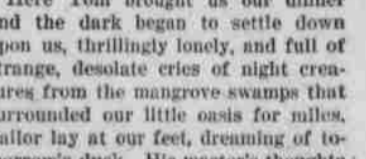
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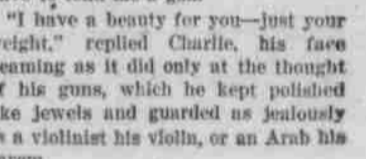
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