

**ЛЕГКО ЧИТАЕМ
ПО-АНГЛИЙСКИ**

3
УРОВЕНЬ



Jack London

THE LITTLE LADY OF THE BIG HOUSE

Джек Лондон

**МАЛЕНЬКАЯ ХОЗЯЙКА
БОЛЬШОГО ДОМА**

словарь • комментарии • упражнения

Легко читаем по-английски

Джек Лондон

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Маленькая хозяйка большого дома /
The Little Lady Of The Big House

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1

“**Paula**¹, **Dick Forrest**², a rich rancher, said to his wife, a vivacious, athletic, and self-aware woman. “My best friend, **Evan Graham**³, will arrive tomorrow morning. Tell the servant to put him in the **watchtower**⁴. I hope he will work on his book.”

“Graham?—Graham?” Paula asked. “Do I know him?”

“You met him once two years ago, in **Santiago**⁵. He had dinner with us.”

“Oh, one of those naval officers?”

Dick shook his head.

“The **civilian**⁶. Don’t you remember that big blond fellow—you talked about music with him for half an hour?”

“Oh, to be sure,” Paula vaguely recollected. “He’d met you somewhere before ... **South Africa**⁷, wasn’t it? Or **the Philippines**⁸?”

“That’s right. South Africa, it was. Evan Graham. Next time we met was on the boat on the **Yellow Sea**⁹.”

“But **who about him**¹⁰, and what about him?” Paula queried. “And what’s the book?”

“Well, first of all, **beginning at the end**¹¹, **he’s broke**¹²—that is, for him, he’s broke. He’s got an income of several thousand a year left, but all that his father left him is gone. But he doesn’t whimper. He’d graduated from the university. His book covers last year’s trip across **South America**¹³, West coast to East coast. The Brazilian government voluntarily gave him an honorarium of ten thousand dollars for the information concerning unexplored portions of **Brazil**¹⁴. Oh, he’s a man, a real man! You know the type—clean, big, strong, simple; been everywhere, seen everything, knows most of a lot of things, straight, looks you in the eyes—well, in short, a real man, indeed!”

Ernestine¹⁵, Paula’s sister, clapped her hands, and exclaimed: “And he will come tomorrow!”

Dick shook his head reprovingly.

“Oh, **nothing in that direction**¹⁶, Ernestine. Many nice girls like you have tried to hook Evan Graham. And, between ourselves, I couldn’t blame them. But he’s had fast legs, and they’ve always failed **to get him into a corner**¹⁷, where, dazed and breathless, he could mechanically mutter ‘Yes’ and come out of the trance to find himself roped, thrown, and married. Forget him, Ernestine. Graham is not for you. He’s old like me—just about the same age, forty years old—and, like me, he’s seen a lot. He knows how to run away in time. He doesn’t care for young ladies. He is merely old, and very wise.”

¹ **Paula** – Паола

² **Dick Forrest** – Дик Форрест

³ **Evan Graham** – Ивэн Грэхем

⁴ **watch-tower** – сторожевая башня

⁵ **Santiago** – Сантьяго

⁶ **civilian** – штатский

⁷ **South Africa** – Южная Африка

⁸ **Philippines** – Филиппины

⁹ **Yellow Sea** – Жёлтое море

¹⁰ **who about him** – кто он такой

¹¹ **beginning at the end** – если начать с конца

¹² **he’s broke** – он разорён

¹³ **South America** – Южная Америка

¹⁴ **Brazil** – Бразилия

¹⁵ **Ernestine** – Эрнестина

¹⁶ **nothing in that direction** —здесь ничего не получится

¹⁷ **to get him into a corner** – загнать его в угол

2

“Where’s my little boy?” Dick shouted, walking through the Big House in quest of its Little Lady.

He came to the door that gave entrance to the long wing. It was a door without a knob, a huge panel of wood in a wood-paneled wall. But Dick knew the secret; he pressed the spring, and the door swung wide.

“Where’s my little boy?” he called again.

A glance into the bathroom was fruitless, as were the glances he sent into Paula’s wardrobe room and dressing room. He passed the short, broad stairway that led to her empty divan. He noticed a **drawing easel**¹⁸.

“Where’s my little boy?” he shouted out to the sleeping porch; and found only a demure Chinese woman of thirty, who smiled with embarrassment.

This was Paula’s maid. Dick had taken her, as a child almost, for Paula’s service, from a fishing village on the Yellow Sea.

“Where is your mistress?” Dick asked.

“She maybe with young ladies—I don’t know,” she stammered; and Dick swung away on his heel.

“Where’s my little boy?” he shouted, just as a big limousine pulled up.

“I wish I knew,” a tall, blond man in a light summer suit responded from the car; and the next moment Dick Forrest and Evan Graham were shaking hands.

The servants carried in the hand baggage, and Dick accompanied his guest to the watch tower quarters. The two men were almost of a size. Graham was a clearer blond than Forrest, although both were equally gray of eye, and equally and precisely similarly bronzed by sun. Graham’s features were in a slightly larger mold; his eyes were a little longer. His nose was a little straighter as well as larger than Dick’s, and his lips were a little thicker, and a little redder.

Forrest threw a glance at his wrist watch.

“Eleven-thirty,” he said. “Come along at once, Graham. We don’t eat till twelve-thirty. **I am sending out a shipment of bulls**¹⁹, three hundred of them, and I’m proud of them. You simply must see them. What saddle do you prefer?”

“Oh, anything, **old man**²⁰.”

“English?—Australian?—Scottish?—Mexican?” Dick insisted.

“Scottish, if you please,” Graham surrendered.

They sat their horses by the side of the road and watched the herd.

“I see what you’re doing—it’s great,” Graham said with sparkling eyes.

They turned their horses back for the Big House. Dick looked at his watch again.

“Lots of time,” he assured his guest. “I’m glad you saw those bulls. They are nice indeed. Over there are the fish ponds, you’ll have an opportunity to catch a mess of trout, or bass, or even catfish. You see, I love to make things work. The water works twenty-four hours a day. The ponds are in series, according to the nature of the fish. The water starts working up in the mountains. It irrigates a score of mountain meadows before it makes the plunge and is clarified to crystal clearness in the next few rugged miles; and at the plunge from the highlands it generates half the power and all the lighting used on the ranch. Then it subirrigates lower levels, flows in here to the fish ponds.”

¹⁸ **drawing easel** – мольберт

¹⁹ **I am sending out a shipment of bulls** – я отправляю партию быков

²⁰ **old man** – старина, дружище

“Man,” Graham laughed, “you could make a poem about the water. I’ve met fire-worshippers, but you’re the first real water-worshiper I’ve ever encountered ...”

Graham did not complete his thought. From the right, not far away, came a mighty splash and an outburst of women’s cries and laughter. They emerged in a blaze of sunshine, on an open space among the trees, and Graham saw an unexpected a picture.

And in the center of the pool, vertical in the water, struck upward and outward into the free air, while on its back, slipping and clinging, was the figure form, Graham realize that it was a woman who rode the horse. Her slim round arms were twined in **stallion-mane**²¹, while her white round knees slipped on the sleek.

Graham realized that the white wonderful creature was a woman, and sensed the smallness and daintiness of her. She reminded him of some **Dresden china figure**²² set absurdly small and light and strangely on the drowning back of a titanic beast.

Her face smote Graham most of all. It was a boy’s face; it was a woman’s face; it was serious and at the same time amused. It was a white woman’s face—and modern; and yet, to Graham, it was all-pagan. This was not a creature and a situation one happened upon in the twentieth century.

The stallion sank. Glorious animal and glorious rider disappeared together beneath the surface, to rise together, a second later.

“Ride his neck!” Dick shouted. “Catch his foretop and get on his neck!”

The woman obeyed. The next moment, as the stallion balanced out horizontally in obedience to her shiftage of weight, she had slipped back to the shoulders.

“Who ... who is it?” Graham queried.

“Paula—Mrs. Forrest.”

“**My breath is quite taken away**²³,” Graham said. “Do your people do such things frequently?”

“First time she ever did that,” Forrest replied.

“Risked the horse’s neck and legs as well as her own,” was Graham’s comment.

“Thirty-five thousand dollars’ worth of neck and legs,” Dick smiled. “That was the price the breeders offered me for the horse last. But Paula never has accidents. That’s her luck. We’ve been married ten or a dozen years now, and, do you know, sometimes it seems to me I don’t know her at all, and that nobody knows her, and that she doesn’t know herself.”

²¹ **stallion-mane** – грива

²² **Dresden china figure** – фигурка из дрезденского фарфора

²³ **my breath is quite taken away** – у меня дух захватило

3

The lunch-time came. Graham took his part in the conversation on breeds and breeding, but the delicate white of Paula on the back of a great horse was before his eyes the entire time.

All the guests drifted into the long dining room. Dick Forrest arrived and precipitated cocktails. And Graham impatiently waited the appearance of the woman who had worried his eyes since noon.

She entered. Graham's lips gasped apart, and remained apart, his eyes ravished with the beauty and surprise. Here was no a child-woman or boy-girl on a stallion, but a **grand lady**²⁴.

As she crossed the floor, Graham saw two women: one, the grand lady, the mistress of the Big House; other, the lovely equestrienne beneath the dull-blue, golden-trimmed gown.

She was upon them, among them, and Graham's hand held hers in the formal introduction. At table, across the corner from her, it was his hostess that mostly filled his eyes and his mind.

It was a company Graham had ever sat down to dinner with. The sheep-buyer, and the correspondent, men, women, and girls, fourteen in total. Graham could not remember their names. They were full of spirits, laughter, and the latest jokes.

"I see right now," Graham told Paula, "your place is the caravanserai; I can't even try to remember names and people."

"I don't blame you," she laughed. "But these are neighbors. They visit us in any time. **Mrs. Watson**²⁵, there, next to Dick, is of the old land-aristocracy. That is her grandfather, and that pretty dark-eyed girl is her daughter ..."

And while Paula was describing guests, Graham heard scarce half she said, so occupied was he in trying to understand of her. The pride. That was it! It was in her eye, in the poise of her head, in the curling tendrils of her hair, in her sensitive nostrils, in the mobile lips, in the angle of the rounded chin, in her hands, small, muscular and veined. Pride it was, in every muscle, nerve, and quiver of her—conscious, sentient, stinging pride.

She might be joyous and natural, boy and woman, fun and frolic; but always the pride was there, vibrant, tense, intrinsic. She was a woman, frank, outspoken, straight-looking, plastic, democratic; but she was not a toy.

"Our philosophers can't fight tonight," Paula said to Graham.

"Philosophers?" he questioned back. "Who and what are they? I don't understand."

"They—" Paula hesitated. "They live here. They call themselves the **jungle-birds**²⁶. They have a camp in the woods a couple of miles away, where they read and talk. It's great fun for Dick, and, besides, it saves him time. He's a dreadfully hard worker, you know."

"I understand that they ... that Dick takes care of them?" Graham asked.

As she answered, he was occupied with her long, brown lashes. Perforce, he lifted his gaze to her eyebrows. When she smiled she smiled all of herself, generously, joyously.

"Yes," she was saying. "They have nothing to worry about. Dick is most generous, and he encourages the idleness of men like them. For example, **Terrence McFane**²⁷ is an **epicurean anarchist**²⁸, if you know what that means. He will not hurt a flea. He has a pet cat I gave him, and he carefully picks her fleas, not injuring them, stores them in a box, and sets them free in the forest. And the one with a beard—**Aaron Hancock**²⁹. Like Terrence, he doesn't work. He says that there

²⁴ **grand lady** – светская женщина

²⁵ **Mrs. Watson** – миссис Ватсон

²⁶ **jungle-birds** – лесные птицы

²⁷ **Terrence McFane** – Терренс МакФейн

²⁸ **epicurean anarchist** – анархист-эпикурец

²⁹ **Aaron Hancock** – Аарон Ханкок

have always been peasants and fools who like to work. That's why he wears a beard. To shave, he thinks, is unnecessary work, and, therefore, immoral. Dick had found him in Paris, and assured him: if you ever come back to America, you will have food and shelter. So here he is."

"And the poet?" Graham asked, admiring the smile that played upon her face.

"Oh, Theo—**Theodore Malken**³⁰, though we call him Leo. He doesn't work, either. His relatives are dreadfully wealthy; but they disowned him and he disowned them when he was fifteen. They say he is lunatic, and he says they are merely mad. He really writes remarkable verses ... when he writes. He prefers to dream and live in the jungle with Terrence and Aaron."

"And **the Hindoo**³¹, there—who's he?"

"That's **Dar Hyal**³². He's their guest, a revolutionist. He studied in France, Italy, Switzerland, he is a political refugee from India. Talks about a new synthetic system of philosophy, and about a rebellion against the British tyranny in India. He advocates individual terrorism. He and Aaron quarrel tremendously—that is, on philosophical matters. And now—" Paula sighed and erased the sigh with her smile—"and now, you know about everybody."

One thing Graham noted as the dinner proceeded. The sages called Dick Forrest by his first name; but they always addressed Paula as "Mrs. Forrest," although she called them by their first names. These people respected few things under the sun, and among such few things they recognized the certain definite aloofness in Dick Forrest's wife.

It was the same thing, after dinner, in the big living room. Her laugh fascinated Graham. There was a fibrous thrill in it, most sweet to the ear, that differentiated it from any laugh he had ever heard.

³⁰ **Theodore Malken** – Теодор Мэлкин

³¹ **the Hindoo** – индус

³² **Dar Hyal** – Дар-Хиал

4

“And now, **Red Cloud**³³, sing Mr. Graham your **Acorn Song**³⁴,” Paula commanded Dick. Forrest shook his head somberly.

“The Acorn Song!” Ernestine called from the piano.

“Oh, do, Dick,” Paula pleaded. “Mr. Graham is the only one who hasn’t heard it.”

Dick shook his head.

“Then sing him your **Goldfish Song**³⁵.”

“I’ll sing him **Mountain Lad’s song**³⁶,” Dick said, a whimsical sparkle in his eyes. He stamped his feet, pranced, tossed an imaginary mane, and cried:

“Hear me! I am **Eros**³⁷! I stamp upon the hills!³⁸”

“The Acorn Song,” Paula interrupted quickly and quietly, with steel in her voice.

Dick obediently ceased his chant of Mountain Lad, but shook his head like a stubborn colt.

“I have a new song,” he said solemnly. “It is about you and me, Paula.”

Dick danced half a dozen steps, as Indians dance, slapped his thighs with his palms, and began a new chant.

“Me, I am **Ai-kut**³⁹, the first man, Ai-kut is the short for Adam, and my father and my mother were the coyote and the moon. And this is **Yo-to-to-wi**⁴⁰, my wife. She is the first woman. Her father and her mother were the grasshopper and the ring-tailed cat. They were the best father and mother left after my father and mother. The coyote is very wise, the moon is very old. The mother of all women was a cat, a little, wise, sad-faced, shrewd ring-tailed cat.”

The song of the first man and woman was interrupted by protests from the women and acclamations from the men.

“This is Yo-to-to-wi, which is the short for Eve,” Dick chanted on. “Yo-to-to-wi is very small. But it is not her fault. The fault is with the grasshopper and the ring-tailed cat. Me, I am Ai-kut, the first man. I was the first man, and this, Adam chose Eve. Yo-to-to-wi was the one woman in all the world for me, so I chose Yo-to-to-wi.”

And Evan Graham, listening, thought, “Dick Forrest is lucky—too lucky.”

“Me, I am Ai-kut,” Dick chanted on. “This is my dew of woman. She is my **honey-dew**⁴¹ of woman. I have lied to you. Her father and her mother were neither hopper nor cat. They were the dawn and the summer east wind of the mountains. Yo-to-to-wi is my honey-dew woman. Hear me! I am Ai-kut. Yo-to-to-wi is my quail woman, my deer-woman, my lush-woman of all soft rain and fat soil. She was born of the thin starlight and the brittle dawn-light before the sun ...”

³³ **Red Cloud** – Багряное Облако

³⁴ **Acorn Song** – «Песня про жёлудь»

³⁵ **Goldfish Song** – «Песня о золотой рыбке»

³⁶ **Mountain Lad’s song** – «Песня горца»

³⁷ **Eros** – Эрос

³⁸ **I stamp upon the hills!** – Я попираю холмы!

³⁹ **Ai-kut** – Ай-Кут

⁴⁰ **Yo-to-to-wi** – Йо-то-то-ви

⁴¹ **honey-dew** – медвяная роса

5

The guests asked Paula to play.

“I’m asking you to play ‘**Reflections on the Water**⁴²,” Terrence said to her.

“Oh, **Debussy**⁴³!” Paula laughed.

No sooner was she seated than the three sages slipped away to their listening places. The young poet stretched himself prone on a deep bearskin. Terrence and Aaron took window seats. The girls were sitting on wide couches or in the wood chairs.

All jollity and banter had ceased. Ernestine leaned across from a chair to whisper to Graham:

“She can do anything she wants to do. And she doesn’t work ... much. She doesn’t play like a woman. Listen to that!”

Paula played with the calm and power. Her touch was definite, authoritative. Graham watched the lofty room grow loftier in the increasing shadows.

He was slow in getting ready for bed that night. He was stirred both by the Big House and by the Little Lady who was its mistress. As he sat on the edge of the bed, half-undressed, and smoked out a pipe, he was seeing her in memory, as he had seen her in the flesh the past twelve hours, in her varied moods and guises—the woman who had talked music with him, and who had expounded music to him to his delight

Graham knocked out his pipe. Again he heard Paula Forrest laugh; again he sensed her in silver and steel and strength; again, against the dark, he saw her gown. The bright vision of it was almost an irk to him, so impossible was it for him to shake it from his eyes.

He saw the stallion and the beneath the water, the flurry of foam and floundering of hoofs, and the woman’s face that laughed while she drowned her hair in the drowning mane of the horse.

Finally Graham fell asleep.

⁴² **Reflections on the Water** – «Размышления на воде»

⁴³ **Debussy** – Клод Дебюсси, французский композитор

6

The next morning Graham learned the Big House. Over the billiard table, Graham learned that Dick Forrest never appeared for breakfast, that he worked in bed, had coffee at six, and only on unusual occasions appeared to his guests before the twelve-thirty lunch. As for Paula Forrest, she was a poor sleeper, a late riser, lived behind a door without a knob in a spacious wing, and only on infrequent occasion she appeared before twelve-thirty, and not very often.

Graham came to lunch with an eagerness to see Paula; and he knew definite disappointment when his hostess did not appear.

"A white night," Dick Forrest said. "Do you know, we were married years before I ever saw her sleep. I knew she slept, but I never saw her. I've seen her for three days and nights without closing an eye."

A new guest had arrived that morning, a **Donald Ware**⁴⁴, whom Graham met at lunch. Despite his youth, he was a well-known violinist.

"He loves Paula very much," Ernestine told Graham as they passed out from the dining room. Graham raised his eyebrows.

"Oh, but she doesn't mind," Ernestine laughed. "Every man that comes along does the same thing. **She's used to it.**⁴⁵ She enjoys these people, and gets the best out of them. It's lots of fun to Dick. You'll be doing the same before you're here a week. If you don't, we'll all be surprised mightily. And if you don't, most likely you'll hurt Dick's feelings."

"Oh, well, if so, I suppose I must," Graham sighed. "If it's the custom—well, it's the custom, that's all. But there are so many other nice girls around."

Ernestine dropped her own eyes away, and flushed.

"Little Leo—the poet you remember last night," she said. "He's madly in love with Paula, too. And Terrence—the Irishman, you know—he's mildly in love with her. **They can't help it**⁴⁶, you see; and can you blame them?"

"She surely deserves it all," Graham murmured, although hurt in that the epicurean anarchist who adores to be a loafer and a pensioner could even be in love with the Little Lady. "She is most deserving of all men's admiration," he continued smoothly. "From the little I've seen of her she's quite remarkable and most charming."

"She's my **half-sister**⁴⁷," Ernestine said, "But she's so different. She's different from any girl I ever knew—though she isn't exactly a girl. She's thirty-eight, you know—"

"Oh," Graham whispered.

The pretty young blonde looked at him in surprise and bewilderment.

"Yes!" she cried. "You will find we are very frank here. Everybody knows Paula's age. She tells it herself. I'm eighteen—so, there. And now, how old are you?"

"As old as Dick," he replied promptly.

"And he's forty," she laughed triumphantly. "Are you going to swim? The water will be dreadfully cold."

Graham shook his head. "I'm going to ride with Dick."

"Oh," she protested, "some of his eternal green manures, or hillside terracing, or watering."

"But he said something about swimming at five."

Her face brightened joyously.

⁴⁴ **Donald Ware** – Доналд Уэйр

⁴⁵ **She's used to it.** – Она к этому привыкла.

⁴⁶ **they can't help it** – они ничего не могут с этим поделать

⁴⁷ **half-sister** – сводная сестра

“Then we’ll meet at the pool. Paula said at five, too.”

As they parted under a long arcade, where his way led to the tower room for a change into riding clothes, she stopped suddenly and called:

“Oh, Mr. Graham.”

He turned obediently.

“You really must not fall in love with Paula, you know.”

“I shall be very, very careful,” he said solemnly, although there was a twinkle in his eye as he concluded.

Nevertheless, as he went on to his room, he admitted to himself that the Paula Forrest charm had already reached him. He would prefer to ride with her than with his old friend Dick.

As he emerged from the house, he looked eagerly for his hostess. Only Dick was there, and the **stableman**⁴⁸. Dick pointed out her horse.

“I don’t know her plans,” he said. “She hasn’t shown up yet, but **at any rate**⁴⁹ she’ll be swimming later. We’ll meet her then.”

Graham appreciated and enjoyed the ride. Then they went to the pool.

⁴⁸ **stable-man** – конюх

⁴⁹ **at any rate** – во всяком случае

7

“Have you—of course, you have,” said Paula. “learned **to win through an undertow**⁵⁰?”

“Yes, I have,” Graham answered, looking at her cheeks. Thirty-eight! He wondered if Ernestine had lied. Paula Forrest did not look twenty-eight. Her skin was the skin of a girl, with all the delicate, fine-pored and thin transparency of the skin of a girl.

“By not fighting the undertow,” she went on. “By yielding to its down-drag and out-drag, and working with it to reach air again. Dick taught me that trick.”

“Will you **sport a bet**⁵¹, Evan?” Dick Forrest queried.

“I want to hear the terms of it first,” was the answer.

“Cigars against cigars that you can’t catch Paula in the pool inside ten minutes—no, inside five, for I remember you’re an excellent swimmer.”

“Oh, give him a chance, Dick,” Paula cried generously. “Ten minutes will worry him.”

“But you don’t know him,” Dick argued. “And you don’t value my cigars. I tell you he is a good swimmer.”

“Perhaps I’ll reconsider. Tell me his history and prizes.”

“I’ll just tell you one thing. It was in 1892. He did forty miles in forty-five hours, and only he and one other reached the land. And they were all aborigines. He was the only white man; and everybody drowned ...”

“I thought you said there was one other?” Paula interrupted.

“She was a woman,” Dick answered.

“And the woman was then a white woman?” Paula insisted.

Graham looked quickly at her, and although she had asked the question of her husband, her head turned to the turn of his head. Graham answered:

“She was an aborigine.”

“A queen, if you please,” Dick said. “A queen of the ancient tribe. She was **Queen of Huahoa**⁵².”

“How did she succeed?” Paula asked. “Or did you help her?”

“I rather think we helped each other toward the end,” Graham replied. “We were both terribly tired. We reached the land at sunset. We slept where we crawled out of the water. Next morning’s sun burnt us awake, and we crept into the shade of some wild bananas, found fresh water, and went to sleep again. Next I awoke it was night. I took another drink, and slept through till morning. She was still asleep when the aborigines found us.”

“She must be forever grateful,” Paula assumed, looking directly at Graham. “Don’t tell me she wasn’t young, wasn’t beautiful, wasn’t a golden young goddess.”

“Her mother was the Queen of Huahoa,” Graham answered. “Her father was an English gentleman. They were dead at the time of the swim, and **Nomare**⁵³ was queen herself. Yes, she was young. She was beautiful as any woman anywhere in the world may be beautiful. Thanks to her father’s skin, she was not golden brown. But you’ve heard the story undoubtedly—”

He looked at Dick, who shook his head.

“You’ll tell me the rest of the story some time,” Paula said.

“Dick knows it. I don’t understand why he hasn’t told you.”

She shrugged her shoulders.

⁵⁰ **to win through an undertow** – одолевать высокую волну, ныряя под неё

⁵¹ **sport a bet** – держать пари

⁵² **Queen of Huahoa** – королева острова Хуахоа

⁵³ **Nomare** – Номаре

“Perhaps because he’s never had the time.”

Graham laughed.

“I was once a king of the cannibal isles, or of a paradise of a **Polynesian isle**⁵⁴”.

“I see”, Paula waited for Dick to help her off.

⁵⁴ **Polynesian isle** – полинезийский остров

8

“Cigars! And boxes of candy, gloves, or anything,” Ernestine said, smiling.

“But I don’t know Mrs. Forrest’s records, either,” Graham protested. “However, if in five minutes—”

“Ten minutes,” Paula said, “and to start from opposite ends of the pool. Is that fair? If you touch me, you win.”

Graham looked his hostess over with secret approval. She was clad, not in the single white silk slip, but in a coquettish suit of changeable light blue and green silk—almost the color of the pool; the skirt slightly above the knees; with long stockings, and tiny bathing shoes. On her head was a jaunty swimming cap.

Graham walked down to the other end of the hundred-and-fifty-foot pool.

“Paula, you’ll be caught for sure,” Dick warned. “Evan Graham is a real fish man. I saw the rock he dived from at Huahoa. That was after his time, and after the death of Queen Nomare. He was only a youngster—twenty-two. And he did it. So, get ready!”

“It’s almost a shame to play tricks on so reputable swimmer,” Paula said while both waited the signal.

“He may get you before you can **turn the trick**⁵⁵,” Dick warned again.

“All OK,” one of Dick’s guest, Bert, assured. “I went in myself. The pipe is working. There’s plenty of air.”

“Ready!” Dick called. “Go!”

Paula climbed the scaffold and jumped into the water. The moment she entered the water, Graham swung out on the platform and waited. He was confident that he could outspeed her, and his dive entered him in the water twenty feet beyond her entrance.

But at the instant he was in, Dick dipped two flat rocks into the water and struck them together. This was the signal for Paula to change her course. Graham heard the noise and wondered. He swam to the far end at high speed. He pulled himself out and watched the surface of the pool. Little Lady was drawing herself out of the pool at the other end.

Again he ran down the side of the tank, and again she climbed the scaffold. She swam toward the west side of the pool. They almost were in the air at the same time. In the water and under it, he could feel the agitation left by her progress; but the water was so dark he could see nothing.

When he touched the side of the pool he came up. Paula was not in sight. He drew himself out, panting, and stood ready to dive in at the first sign of her. But there were no signs.

“Seven minutes!” said Rita, Ernestine’s sister. “And a half! ... Eight! ... And a half!”

But they saw no Paula Forrest. Strangely, Graham saw no alarm on the faces of the others.

“She’s been under water over two minutes, and you’re all too calm about it,” he said. “I’ve still a minute—maybe I don’t lose,” he added quickly, as he stepped into the pool.

As he went down he turned over and explored the cement wall of the pool with his hands. Midway, possibly ten feet under the surface, his hands encountered an opening in the wall. He boldly entered. There was a pipe and at the end of it a little room, and he could stand up.

His fingers touched a cool smooth arm that shrank convulsively at contact while the possessor of it cried sharply. He held on tightly and began to laugh, and Paula laughed with him.

“You frightened me when you touched me,” she said. “You came without a sound, and I was a thousand miles away, dreaming ...”

“What?” Graham asked.

⁵⁵ **turn the trick** – проверить трюк

“Well, honestly, I had just got an idea for a gown. And the only jewellery, a ring—one enormous ruby that Dick gave me years ago when we sailed together.”

“Is there anything you don’t do?” he laughed.

She joined with him.

“Who told you about the pipe?” she next asked.

“No one. I just understood.”

“It was Dick’s idea. You will find him full of whimsies. He liked to scare old ladies into fits by stepping off into the pool with their sons or grandsons and hiding away in here.”

“Well?—going to stay there all night?” Bert’s voice came down the pipe.

“It’s time to go back,” Paula suggested. “It’s not the coziest place in the world. Shall I go first?”

“By all means—and I’ll be right behind.”

“Somebody told you,” was Bert’s prompt accusation, when Graham rose to the surface of the pool and climbed out.

“And you were the scoundrel who rapped stone under water,” Graham said. “It was a **crooked game**⁵⁶, a conspiracy, and a felony. It’s a case for the district attorney.”

“But you won,” Ernestine cried.

“I certainly did, and, therefore, I shall not prosecute you, nor any one of your crooked gang—if the bets are paid promptly. Let me see—you owe me a box of cigars—”

“One cigar, sir!”

“A box! A box!”

⁵⁶ a crooked game – нечестная игра

9

Dick had started a gambling game. It went on at a big table at the far end of the room, accompanied by much owing and borrowing of small sums.

With nine players, the game was crowded, and Graham, with a profound sigh at the loss of his last bet—a nickel—announced that he was going to take a turn around the room to change his luck. He wanted to see Paula.

At this point, Ernestine told Graham:

“We’re all waiting for you. You and I are partners. Besides, Paula’s going to sleep. So say good night, and let her go.”

Paula had left for bed at ten o’clock. Dick said good night to Graham and continued on with his pretty sister-in-law toward her quarters.

“Just a tip, Ernestine,” he said at parting, his voice was serious to warn her.

“What have I done?” she pouted laughingly.

“Nothing ... as of yet. But don’t get started. You’re only a kid yet—eighteen; and a nice, likable kid. Enough to make any man sit up and take notice. But Evan Graham is not any man—”

“Oh, I can take care of myself,” she blurted out in a fling of quick resentment.

“But listen to me. There comes a time for a girl when she mustn’t make a mistake and start in loving the wrong man. You haven’t fallen in love with Evan Graham yet, and all you have to do is just not to fall in love with him. He’s not for you, nor for any young girl. He’s an oldster, an ancient, and possibly has forgotten more about love, romantic love, and young things, than you’ll ever learn in a dozen lives. If he ever marries again—”

“Again!” Ernestine broke in.

“Why, he’s been a widower, my dear, for over fifteen years.”

“Then what of it?” she demanded defiantly.

“Just this,” Dick continued quietly. “The fact is that in fifteen years he has not married again. It means—”

“That he’s never recovered from his loss?” Ernestine interpolated. “But that’s no proof—”

“—Means all you have to do is look at him,” Dick held on steadily, “and realize that some very fine women, real wise women, mature women, have tested his endurance. But so far they’ve not succeeded in catching him. Think it over, dear.”

He took one of her hands in his, and drew her against him.

“You know, we **hard-bitten**⁵⁷ old fellows—” he began half-apologetically, half-humorously.

But she made a restless movement of distaste, and cried out:

“The young men are all youngsters, and that’s all. They’re full of life, and spirits, and dance, and song. But they’re not serious. They’re not big. They’re not—oh, they don’t give a girl that sense of proven strength, of, of ... well, of manhood.”

“I understand,” Dick murmured. “But please do not forget to glance at the other side. Life is something to be learned. But young girls like you, Ernestine, have you learned any of it yet?”

“Tell me,” she asked abruptly, almost tragically, “about this wild young romance, about this young woman when he was young, fifteen years ago.”

“Fifteen?” Dick replied promptly. “Eighteen. They had been married for three years before she died. In fact, they were actually married, by a Church, and living in wedlock, about the same moment that you were born.”

“Yes, yes—go on,” she urged nervously. “What was she like?”

⁵⁷ **hard-bitten** – искушённый

“She was a resplendent, golden-brown Polynesian queen whose mother had been a queen before her, whose father was an Oxford man, an English gentleman, and a real scholar. Her name was Nomare. She was Queen of Huahoa. She was barbaric. He was young enough. There was nothing sordid in their marriage. He was no penniless adventurer. She brought him her island kingdom and forty thousand men. He brought to that island his fortune—and it was no inconsiderable fortune. He built a palace that no **South Sea**⁵⁸ island ever possessed before or will ever possess again. Heavens! They had their own royal yacht, their mountain house, their canoe house. I know. I have been at great feasts in it.

When she died, no one knew where Graham was. Oh, what’s the use in telling any more. He was only a boy. She was half-English, half-Polynesian, and a really and truly queen. They were flowers of their races. They were a pair of wonderful children. They lived a fairy tale. And ... well, Ernestine, the years have passed, and Evan Graham has passed from the realm of the youth. It will be a remarkable woman that will ever infatuate him now. Besides, he’s practically broke. Though he didn’t waste his money. As much misfortune, and more, than anything else.”

“Paula is more his kind,” Ernestine said meditatively.

“Yes, indeed,” Dick agreed. “Paula, or any woman as remarkable as Paula, will attract him a thousand times more than all the sweet, young, lovely things like you in the world. We oldsters have our standards, you know.”

“And I’ll have to pay attention at the youngsters,” Ernestine sighed.

“In the meantime, yes,” he chuckled. “Remembering, always, that you, too, in time, may grow into the remarkable, mature woman, who can catch a man like Evan.”

“But I shall be married long before that,” she pouted.

“Which is for the best, my dear. And, now, good night. And you are not angry with me?”

She smiled pathetically and shook her head, put up her lips to be kissed.

Dick Forrest, turning off lights as he went, penetrated the library, and smiled at recollection of the interview with his sister-in-law. He was confident that he had spoken in time. But a remark of Ernestine was echoing in his consciousness: “Paula is more his kind.”

“Fool!” he laughed aloud, continuing on his way. “And married a dozen years!”

⁵⁸ **South Sea** – Южное море

10

It was long after ten in the morning, when Graham wandered into the music room. Despite the fact that he was a several days' guest in the Big House, so big was it that the music room was a new territory. It was an exquisite room where a warm golden light was diffused from a skylight of yellow glass.

Graham was lazily contemplating some pictures, when of his eye, he saw his hostess. She came in from the far entrance. She was clad entirely in white, and looked very young and quite tall.

They smiled greeting across the room. She came toward him.

"You made a mistake with this room," he said gravely.

"No, don't say that! But how?"

"It must be longer, much longer, twice as long at least."

"Why?" she demanded, with a disapproving shake of head.

"Because, then," he answered, "you will walk twice as far this morning and my pleasure of watching you will be correspondingly increased."

"I see you are like Dick," she retorted. "always with your compliments. Now I want to show you the room. Dick gave it to me. It's all mine, you see."

"And the pictures?"

"I selected them," she nodded, "every one of them. They're beautiful, aren't they?"

Graham was prepared to talk on pictures, when Donald Ware entered. His violin was under his arm, and he crossed to the piano.

"We're going to work till lunch," Paula explained to Graham. "We'll see you there. You can stay if you care, of course; but I warn you it's really going to be work. And we're going swimming this afternoon. Four o'clock at the pool, Dick says. Also, he's got a new song he's going to sing then. What time is it, Mr. Ware?"

"Ten minutes to eleven," the musician answered briefly.

"You're ahead of time—the engagement was for eleven. And till eleven you'll wait, sir. I must see Dick, first. I haven't said good morning to him yet."

Paula knew her husband's timetable. Her notes reminded her that he had coffee at six-thirty; was inaccessible between nine and ten, dictating correspondence to Blake; was inaccessible between ten and eleven, conferring with **managers and foremen**⁵⁹.

At eleven, unless there were unexpected telegrams or business, she could usually find Dick alone. Passing the secretaries' room, she pressed the button that swung aside a section of filled book-shelves and revealed the tiny spiral of steel steps that led up to Dick's work room. A shade of vexation passed across her face as she recognized **Jeremy Braxton's**⁶⁰ voice. Jeremy was the **general superintendent of the Harvest Group**⁶¹. And the news he was telling was not good. She paused in indecision and stole back down the spiral on her way to the music room. She was depressed, due to her missing her morning greeting to Dick. But this depression vanished at seeing Graham, who had lingered with Ware at the piano.

"Don't run away," she urged. "Stay and watch the people work. Maybe you will start that book Dick has told me about."

⁵⁹ **managers and foremen** – экономки и управляющие

⁶⁰ **Jeremy Braxton** – Джереми Брэкстон

⁶¹ **general superintendent of the Harvest Group** – старший директор золотых рудников «Группа Харвест»

11

On Dick's face, at lunch, there was no sign of trouble over the Harvest Group. After lunch everybody went out for a walk.

Paula wore a tan linen blouse with white **turnback collar**⁶². A short skirt reached the knees. Skirt and trousers were of fawn-colored silk corduroy. Soft white gauntlets on her hands matched with the collar in the one emphasis of color. Her head was bare.

"I don't see how you can keep such a skin and expose yourself to the sun this way," Graham said.

"I don't," she smiled with a dazzle of white teeth. "That is, I don't expose my face this way more than a few times a year."

As four o'clock approached, Donald Ware returned in a car to the Big House. Dick was at the pool when the party arrived, and the girls were immediately insistent for the new song.

"It isn't exactly a new song," Dick explained, his gray eyes twinkling roguery, "and it's not my song. It was sung in Japan before I was born, and, I think, before **Columbus**⁶³ discovered America. Also, it is a duet—a competitive duet with **forfeit penalties**⁶⁴ attached. Paula will sing it with me—I'll teach you. Sit down there, that's right—now all the rest of you gather around and sit down."

Paula sat down, facing her husband, in the center of the sitting audience. Then he sang the song, which was short and which she quickly **picked up**⁶⁵, singing it with him and clapping the accent. It was chanted slowly, almost monotonously:

⁶² **turnback collar** – отложной воротник

⁶³ **Columbus** – Колумб

⁶⁴ **forfeit penalties** – игра в фанты

⁶⁵ **picked up** – подхватила (песню)

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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