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\* **THE DEATH LURE** \*

\* **A Love Story Built Around** \*  
\* **Pearl Hunting.** \*

"Beware of the death lure,"  
Levantine wives of pearl divers would tell their husbands; they told their children, too, when they were old enough to follow their trade. What was the death lure? They would ask. The mother recounted the legend. It was the phosphorescent lure, resembling a pearl with which some hideous monster of the deep fished for men, even as men fished for the wealth of the sea. Yet never could any mother recount a case she herself had known of such a death. Still, her cousin, who was dead, had told her—or her husband's father had known a man thus killed. Then the diver laughed at her story and went into the sea.

These bold Levantines followed the sea from Greece to Singapore, and wherever the pearl oyster was thickest, there they were to be found. Thus it happened that Carlo and Emilio were gathering oysters from the beds by the shores of Trincomalee. Rivals they were in love as well as in the quest for wealth; for the one who should first bring back 500 liras would win the hand of Maria, the belle of Jaffa, their home. And Carlo had already two-thirds that sum, for luck had rewarded him. Emilio had nothing. Each oyster that he took was priceless. Emilio hated Carlo;

nor was the bitterness of his hate softened that day when they fished side by side, submerged up to their necks in water. For that day Carlo had found a perfect pearl, worth 5 liras from the hand of any of the Chinese dealers.

Suddenly Carlo's eyes grew wide with astonishment. He glanced at Emilio cautiously. Emilio had not noticed him. Then he looked down again. There, in the depths beneath him, was something that shimmered and shone—a pearl of fabulous value, just in the orifice of the shell of an oyster. Carlo stretched down his hand. An instant later Emilio heard a cry of agony. He looked around; Carlo was battling with his free arm to hold his head above water.

"Save me, Emilio!" he screamed. "I am caught fast. Hold my head before I am dragged under!"

Emilio leaped to Carlo's side. Then, glancing down, he perceived what Carlo had failed to see. Carlo's arm was caught fast between the shells of one of that rare species of gigantic clams measuring perhaps three feet in diameter. Such mollusks, which inhabit East Indian waters, attract passing fish by their luminous lure and easily pull them down, holding them prisoners until death supervenes. But fish can live a long while beneath the water. A man cannot live five minutes.

Carlo's struggles grew weaker. In his cramped attitude, his strength was almost exhausted.