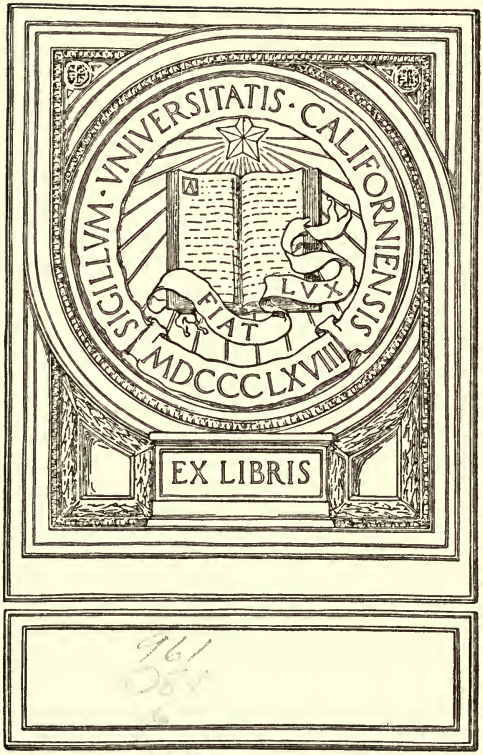
A PERSON OF SOME IMPORTANCE

Lloyd Osbourne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A PERSON OF SOME IMPORTANCE

"What a strange, impetuous boy!" she exclaimed

A PERSON OF SOME IMPORTANCE

By

LLOYD OSBOURNE

AUTHOR OF

THE ADVENTURER, INFATUATION, ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

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A PERSON OF SOME IMPORTANCE

CHAPTER I

DISGRACED

MATTHEW BROUGHTON lost his father in 1889; and less than two years later, his mother, worn out by privation, poverty and the bitter struggle to keep a roof over her boy's head and her own, was laid beside her husband in the Manaswan cemetery. Matt, as he was called, was then fifteen years old, as tall as a man, and pale with the all-day confinement in a lawyer's office where he was employed as a clerk. To his uncle, who had come to his nephew's assistance none too willingly, he appeared an awkward, countrified youth, with neither manners nor looks to recommend him; and Admiral Beatty, whose benevolence was prompted by remorse at having done so little for his sister in her lifetime, was at small pains to hide his disappointment in her son.

This old gentleman had little else than his retired pay to live on, and an expensive family to take care of. To him the red-eyed, shabbily dressed young-

ster appeared as the emblem of drastic economies to come; and as the equivalent of good cigars, cosy club dinners, and a thoroughbred Kentucky mare, he certainly came high; and the admiral's face, usually so genial, grew very overcast at the prospect.

But he took Matt back to Washington with him; tried in his stiff way to be kind; and after some reflection as to what was to be done, secured for the boy an appointment to the Naval Academy at Annapolis. Matt's education, as far as it had gone, was of the ordinary, ineffectual character—a smattering of everything under the sun, from physiology to Greek art—an imposing curriculum that none the less left him unable to spell, or even write, two coherent lines of good English. It took eight months' coaching to prepare him for the entrance examinations, which he not only passed successfully, but had the keen delight of seeing his name third on the list.

Annapolis did wonders for Matt. In two years he was one of the smartest, best set-up, manliest-looking fellows in the academy. His half-starved frame filled out; his face grew ruddy with health; erect and graceful, his black head, fine complexion, and dark flashing eyes attracted admiration everywhere. He led in everything, whether in play or studies; the traditions of the place became his religion; ardent, clever and high-spirited, his whole nature responded to one of the best-devised systems ever invented for the making of men.

It was about this time that a Baltimore negro

named Raphael Stokes was admitted to the academy, to the unbounded resentment of every one within its walls. He was not the first colored brother to take advantage of his constitutional rights in this respect; but more stubborn than his predecessors, and to do him justice, an able and ambitious young man, he defied the enormous pressure brought against him, and what was almost harder to bear—the heart-breaking isolation in which he was doomed to live. In after years, with broadened humanity and a greater sympathy and understanding, Matt was bitterly ashamed of his own part in the persecution of Raphael Stokes. But at the period it seemed a righteous task; the honor of the navy appeared to be at stake; by hook or by crook, by fair means or foul, the service had to be saved from the disgrace of a negro officer.

Matt was no worse than the rest of the academy; in fact in one way he was better, for with characteristic directness he once sought an interview with Stokes, and explained the whole matter with boyish candor.

"We have nothing against you personally," he said. "You're a pretty good sort, Stokes, and it is no pleasure to us to try to make you uncomfortable here. But you are an intruder, and we can't let you stay. I'm not saying that such prejudice is right—but we've been brought up to it; it's in our blood; even if you stick it out and graduate, you will simply pass from one hell to another."

"Thank you, Broughton, but I intend to stay," returned Stokes, setting a jaw he had inherited from a Presbyterian grandfather.

Months later, when the negro broke down in class, hysterical and overwrought by the strain of that unequal conflict, he was ordered to the superintendent's office and a searching inquiry was instituted. Matt was less guilty than twenty others, yet he found himself among the four who were placed under arrest. Justice in such cases is always somewhat capricious; too often it is the truthful and straightforward who suffer, while the meaner escape. Summary dismissal followed and Matt turned his back on the Academy for ever.

Admiral Beatty gave Matt a furious reception. He told the boy that he had thrown away all his chances in life; that he was irretrievably disgraced; and read aloud, with fiery emphasis, a scathing editorial on the affair in one of the administration newspapers. The country was on the eve of a national election, and the black vote had to be placated by an appearance of severity toward the four cadets. But Matt knew nothing of these underlying causes, nor did his uncle. All he could see was his name, in staring letters, held up to public obloquy. His career was gone; his uncle had turned against him; his whole little world had tumbled about his ears. He managed to blurt out a few words of thanks for the old man's past kindnesses, saluted, and left the house in despair. That night he was in New York,

and the next day shipped as an ordinary seaman on the British steel ship, *Windsor Castle,* bound for Honolulu with coal.

In South lat. 21, West long. 123, at a point about six hundred and eighty-four sea miles east southeast of the Marquesas Islands, and during the course of a heavy, sweltering afternoon, an old hand named Louey began to sniff in an uneasy, dissatisfied sort of way. After a while he slouched aft, returning with the second mate, who began to sniff, too. The result of their whispered deliberations was to call the first mate, who sniffed and sent for the captain. By this time every one was sniffing, though the horrifying word for their fears was left unsaid. The captain ordered off the fore hatch, and it had hardly risen an inch before there was a sudden gush of smoke, and the penetrating odor of gas and soot. Careful stowing, ventilation, unceasing watchfulness—all had been in vain, for somewhere in the bowels of that three thousand tons of coal, spontaneous combustion—the most dreaded, the most mysterious of all disasters—had fired the whole with a deadly, tiny flash.

For a couple of days the *Windsor Castle* was held to her course, a stifled volcano, half sinking with the weight of water poured into her. But the fire could not be smothered nor drowned; and it was at length decided to lay her for the Marquesas in the hope of sinking her in some shallow bay before the devouring demon could pass the hatches. Great

patches of her deck had now reddened ominously; her bows hissed as they dipped into the swell; she had become a floating furnace, the sails parching to tinder on her yards, and the men risking their lives every time they went aloft. Two of her boats were made ready, provisioned and equipped, and at the last extremity were lowered and manned. As they pulled clear of the vessel flame could be seen leaping and twisting through the smoke that rose mountain-high above her decks; the sky, as far as the eye could reach, was darkened as though with an impending tempest. The loneliness, weirdness and awful majesty of the scene held the men spell-bound at their oars, and when they were roused to make sail the order was obeyed in silence.

Matt was in the first mate's boat, which proved much the faster of the two; and despite the captain's orders, and even entreaties, gave him the slip during the night. The mate was a decent enough man, and well-meaning, but he had a wife in Biddeford, and an old mother to support—and self-preservation is the first law.

They made Uapu in eleven days, and after a brief stay to rest and leave one of their sick, held on to Nuka Hiva, the principal island of the group. Here at Taiohae, the little capital, they were received with extraordinary consideration by the French officials and residents, who gave them a house to live in, and vied with one another to raise a substantial purse. The commandant requisitioned all the vessels in

port, and sent them to scour every corner of the archipelago for any trace of the missing boat; but it was never seen again, and the fate it met can only be conjectured. Matt owed his life to the ship's carpenter, Olsen, a big Swede.

"You take the whaler, sonny," he had said confidentially, waggling a red eyebrow with immense significance. "Just you stick to the whaler, no matter what any one says or orders." It had cost Matt his watch-chain to make the change with an apprentice named Betts, and it gave him a gruesome feeling afterward to remember the price Betts had paid for it. Olsen subsequently confided to him with a mirthless cackle, that the captain's boat was "that rotten you could shove your fist through it, though if I had let on they would have loaded the whaler gunwales under, and nobody would never have got nowhere!"

It did not take Matt long to make up his mind to remain in the islands. Exaggerating the disgrace of his expulsion from the Academy, still smarting and humiliated at the thought of his lost career, he was possessed with the idea to hide, to get far away and be forgotten. Three months in a deep-water ship had disillusioned him of the idea of any future there. He could see nothing but years of ill-paid drudgery, wretchedness, hardship and the vilest food, with only the most problematical chance of ever reaching the quarter-deck. Even this had no particular attraction for him—the command of tubs like the

Windsor Castle, with the salary of a railroad conductor, and microscopic percentages.

Here, in the Marquesas, he was on the edge of another world, alluring, mysterious and beautiful. He listened greedily to the tales of labyrinthine seas, abounding in pearl and shell; of fortunes won and kingdoms overturned by white adventurers; of lovely islands, with melodious savage names, flying their own flags, and ruled over by half-naked kings and queens. Why should he not become a second John Cæsar Goddefroy, with fleets of ships; or rival Sternberg, who had held Samoa in his hand? Had not Shirley Baker ruled Tonga for twenty years; was not Young's daughter the Queen of Manu'a; were not the Jenkinses of Gente Hermosa the grandchildren of a hardy old seaman who had founded a mimic empire and handed it down to his descendants? Was not Tahiti in the virtual possession of the Branders and the Salmons, the children of two bygone Englishmen who had waged wars and risen to kanaka greatness?

Small wonder that the boy's head was full of dreams; that he beheld before him wonderful and picturesque opportunities; that either by love or force of arms he, too, was resolved to gain a kingdom. The wife of one of the merchants was a Tahitian, half-white, of extraordinary beauty, who was at home in four languages, and an accomplished musician as well. She helped not a little to stir Matt's imagination and give form to the shad-

owy queens and princesses that played so important a part in his fairy tales. The rightful king of the Marquesas also figured conspicuously in these fancies. He was a grave, dignified, rather silent man, who drew a pension from the French government, and worked hard as a surveyor in mapping out the native lands. He had lent Matt a horse to ride; befriended him in many ways, and often dilated on the former glories of his house. These melancholy confidences from the lips of a real king, however much reduced, flattered Matt, and moved him with an intoxicating sense of romance. Assuredly the Pacific was the place for him, and he thanked his stars afresh at having escaped from the dingy fo'castle of the *Windsor Castle*.

The governor, a French naval officer, had also taken a great liking for Matt, giving him the hospitality of his bungalow in return for lessons in English. This M. Fouquier was a delightful fellow, who regarded his temporary appointment as a huge joke, and ruled his *canaques* in a most easy-going fashion. "They are children, *mon cher,*" he would say to Matt, "and one must treat them with the same indulgence." The "hard labor" of the convicts consisted mostly in tidying up the commandant's front yard, or sleeping on his porch. "Step softly, or we may awake them," Fouquier would remark, tiptoeing through the sleeping figures on his way to play billiards at the club. "Though, stop—thousand thunders,—I'm going to lecture yonder *misérable*

—he borrowed my music-box, and never took the trouble to return it!"

When the jailer was discharged because of a shortage in his accounts, the commandant offered the post to Matt, who accepted it with alacrity—for it carried a salary of sixty Chile dollars a month, not to speak of occasional perquisites in the way of sucking-pigs and fish. Thus provided for he was very willing to stay behind, and let his fellow castaways go on to Tahiti without him. The British and American consuls there had perfunctorily arranged for the survivors of the *Windsor Castle* to be brought down, and thence sent on to New Zealand by steamer. Matt saw them off with a light heart, for with their departure the last link that bound him to civilization—and to disgrace—seemed to snap. How little did he realize, as he wrung those calloused hands, and warmly wished his former shipmates the best of luck, that his decision was to cost him a terrible price!

In the office of Williams and Hadley, ship-brokers, Honolulu, was a little package of letters for Matt, addressed in their care. One was from Raphael Stokes:

"Dear Broughton:

"My health and nerves are all gone, and I am out of the Academy for good. I could always feel how it went against your generous and kindly nature to treat me ill, though even at your worst you were never so mean as the others. I sup-

pose it will surprise you to hear that I admired you more than anybody in the world, and that a slight from you was a thousand times more wounding than the abominable personal persecutions of your friends. Now you will learn from this that a poor 'nigger' can be grateful for even a little. I have seen the president myself, as per enclosed cutting from the *Star,* and have managed to beg you off. Put that to my credit and, for God's sake, don't think I ever meant intentionally to give you away. Your dismissal cost me the bitterest tears of the many I have shed, for you were the only one who ever treated me with a spark of consideration."

In an official envelope was a curt notification from the navy department, to the effect that the president had been pleased to reinstate Mr. Matthew Broughton in the naval academy, and that he was to report to the superintendent at once.

For many years these letters lay unopened and unclaimed in a dusty pigeon-hole, and were at last destroyed on the occasion of the ship-brokers moving to another office. They went up the chimney in smoke, and with them, in all probability, an honorable and distinguished career.

CHAPTER II

WHO IS JOHN MORT?

THE moonlight streamed through the palms, outlining on the beach a vivid tracery of fronds and stems. Across the lagoon, softened and mellowed by the stretch of glassy water, came the sound of a mouth-organ, and the rhythmic beat of a wooden drum, as the crew of the *North Star* raised the chorus of "Good-by, My Feleni." At intervals there was a deeper note, as some mighty comber flung its might against the coral and burst with fury on the seaward reefs.

In all those lonely seas there is no lonelier island than Lotoalofa. On some Pacific charts it is called the "Four Crowns of Quiros," with a question-mark after it. On others, when it is noticed at all, it figures variously as "Melampus Reef, p. d.," "Winslow Shoals, p. d.," or merely "Island, e. d."—p. d. signifying "position doubtful," and e. d. "existence doubtful." In the fifties its handful of inhabitants was carried away bodily by Peruvian slavers; in later years it attracted the attention of Bully Hayes, who had had the intention, never to be carried out, of making it into a sort of pirate stronghold, and to this day there stands his battery of six small, rusty, iron cannon, commanding the anchorage.

Here, leaning against one of these venerable guns, were two men in close and earnest conversation. One of them was about forty-five, tall and thin, with high cheek-bones, and a narrow, ugly, withered face, whose usual expression was one of sardonic melancholy. But it was not a commonplace face nor a weak one. The pale blue eyes were masterful, the nose pronounced, and the general air distinguished. Whatever else he had been in the past, John Mort, as he called himself, was ineradicably a cavalry officer, with an underlying military harshness that on occasions could flame up like a volcano.

His companion was Matt Broughton, now a man of thirty-one, sobered, hardened, and somewhat worn by eleven years on the outposts of civilization. If his boyish dreams were still unrealized, it had not been for lack of striving. He had thrown himself whole-heartedly into that life of danger, daring and romance, and all he had to show for it were a few scars, a smattering of half a dozen outlandish dialects, and the memory of some desperate chances, taken and lost. At thirty-one he had achieved nothing more tangible than a hundred dollars a month and the command of John Mort's schooner—and even these he was now abandoning, to begin again with nothing.

"But, my friend, is there anything you complain of?" Mort was asking, his slight foreign accent more marked than usual as the result of his concern.

"Oh, no, sir."

"Money? Shall I double your salary—treble it? That is simple."

Matt shook his head.

"It is here," he said, laying his hand to his heart. "I don't know what's the matter with me; but I'm tired of it all; homesick, perhaps, dissatisfied, depressed."

"And you are determined to leave me?"

"Do not reproach me, sir. I told you this before my last trip, not wishing to take you unawares."

"I'm sorry," said John Mort with emotion. "Sorry for myself at losing one I like and admire, who for six years has always been so faithful, so loyal. Sorry, too, for you, my friend, that you should choose to go back among strangers—back to that accursed civilization where none fares so well as the greedy and unprincipled—where, like a lot of worms in a pot, all are struggling to save themselves on the bodies of those below. What will they do with you? Put a collar on your neck, harness you to the shafts, and lash you till you drop. So, is it that you prefer? So, is it that for which you will surrender this?" Mort raised his hand to the tropic moon. "What a choice!" he murmured. "What a choice!"

"It is an impulse stronger than I am," returned Matt after a silence. "After all, I am a white man, and those are my people. Have you never felt that sudden longing to get back—that overpowering, irresistible, unreasoning—longing?"

"No," retorted John Mort savagely. "No, no, no! To me it is a hell I have left for ever."

"I wonder at myself," said Matt. "There is not a soul in the world I respect more, admire more—yes, love—than I do you. Yet I am going."

John Mort's eyes glistened, and he put out his hand, which the other grasped.

"Well, so be it," he said.

"Then, may I sail to-night with land-breeze?"

"Yes, you may sail."

"And my accounts, my vouchers, and all that? You ought to pass them, sir, as well as arrange about the *North Star's* return. Pardon my insistence, but you have put it off and off—"

"What amount have you in the ship's safe?"

"Nearly eight hundred pounds, sir, in French, English and American gold, besides the chest of Chile silver."

"My friend, it is yours, and the schooner also, it is yours. It is small enough return for such loyal service—ah, indeed, much too small, and I will increase it with this—" As he spoke he drew from his finger a superb ruby ring, and forced it on Matt, whose stammering words of thanks were cut bruskly short.

"There's another matter much more pressing," he exclaimed, "a pledge to be given, and by you sacredly kept—and—"

"But, sir, how will you manage without a vessel?" expostulated Matt, altogether bewildered. "You can

not allow yourself to be marooned here—utterly cut off from all—"

"Oh, I fear not that. We are self-sustaining now, and besides, in a couple of years I look forward confidently for your return. Isolation has no terrors for me—rather a charm, a picturesqueness, and a greater sense of security."

John Mort paused on the last word, peering strangely at his companion.

"Do you realize, Broughton," he continued at last, "that during our six years' close association, intimacy, you have never asked me a question; that you have never betrayed the least inquisitiveness; that you have seen me draw forth whole packets of Bank of England notes, often thousands and thousands of pounds—and never once have you disturbed me by even a look?"

"Your private affairs were none of my business, sir."

"True—but you must have wondered?"

"Oh, yes."

"And speculated, conjectured, racked your head at a life so peculiar and mysterious?"

"It has puzzled me, I admit, but I have always made it a point of honor to keep my curiosity to myself."

"And even now, when you are going away, perhaps for ever, with the riddle still unsolved, are you not tempted to ask?"

"Well, I suppose it's just this, sir: if you wished me to know you would tell me."

John Mort mused as though, indeed, he were very near to making a confidant of his companion. The spell of the moon, the beauty and stillness of the tropic night, the faint, mellow throb of the wooden drum timing a barbaric chant far across the water—all were conducive to an access of friendship, of affection and trust, that might sweep away the last barriers of reserve. He struck a match on the corsair's cannon, lit a cigarette, and with an appearance of some indecision, took a few whiffs before he spoke.

"It is enough for you to know that I am a ghost," he said oddly. "Mort means dead, and the fancy pleased me to take it for my name. Before I died I was a person of some importance; of sufficient importance, in fact—were my existence here ever to be known—for the news of it to shake the world. Broughton, I ask no promises, no oaths; I simply tell you that my life, my happiness, all that is dearest and most precious to me—hang on your discretion. Vaster issues are at stake than you can dream of, and to-day there are hundreds on my track. A chance remark of yours, an unguarded word, the most innocent of confidences—and these bloodhounds might seize a clue that would destroy me. Broughton, I rely on you to guard my secret."

"I shall guard it, sir."

"And you appreciate, even in this half-told way, its supreme, its vital importance?"

"I do, sir."

"Then, let us go back."

In silence they walked up the path to the broad veranda of the house—the house that had taken three years to build, whose massive walls were timbered with whole trees—a low, red-tiled, Spanish structure, in appearance half fort and half monastery, with a cloistered court where a fountain played. It had taken the *North Star* a dozen voyages to furnish it with a splendor almost incredible, considering the remoteness of the island and how recently its only inhabitants had been crabs and sea-mews. Noble pictures, Venetian carvings and old brocades, Flemish tapestry, exquisite furniture still showing the faded gild of mediæval Italy—nothing, so it seemed to Matt, could vie in taste and luxury, in grandeur delicately modernized, softened and restrained—with this coral palace that sheltered Mort in exile.

But of all the beautiful objects within its walls, none could compare with its mistress, that radiant, girlish Mirovna, who shared John Mort's fortunes, and engrossed his entire heart. As fair as he was dark, with crisp golden hair more red than yellow, with captivating blue eyes, and a mouth all wantonness and dainty impudence, she could hardly have been more than twenty when Matt first remembered her in Guadalcanaar. Who she was or what she had

been, actress, dancer or exalted lady, Pole, Russian, Albanian or Magyar—all was a mystery she shared with her somber husband. Matt knew nothing save that she was one of the most adorable of women. Her caressing and pretty friendship meant much to him, and he repaid it with the profound regard of a man that had no other woman in his life. Had the need arisen he could have died in her defense, without the slightest thought of heroism or sacrifice, as men still can do on the frontiers of civilization. In point of fact, however, his zeal had been more actively engaged in matching ribbons, buying *lingerie,* choosing Paquin gowns, and using his own judgment in regard to French bonnets in Sydney—not always with the success his anxious efforts deserved.

"Oh, you poor, darling, silly capitan!" Mirovna would only too often exclaim in her bubbling broken English. "What you get that for? A monkey? I think you want play organ while I dance up and down with tin cup!"

But all that was over now, to melt for ever in the swirl of receding years. He was probably seeing that familiar room for the last time, and those dearer faces of his friends. Matt's heart was very full, and he faltered under Mirovna's questioning gaze.

"I can not persuade him," said Mort with affected lightness, stooping to kiss his wife's hand, "the captain abandons us."

There was no reproach in Mirovna's face, rather concern and regret.

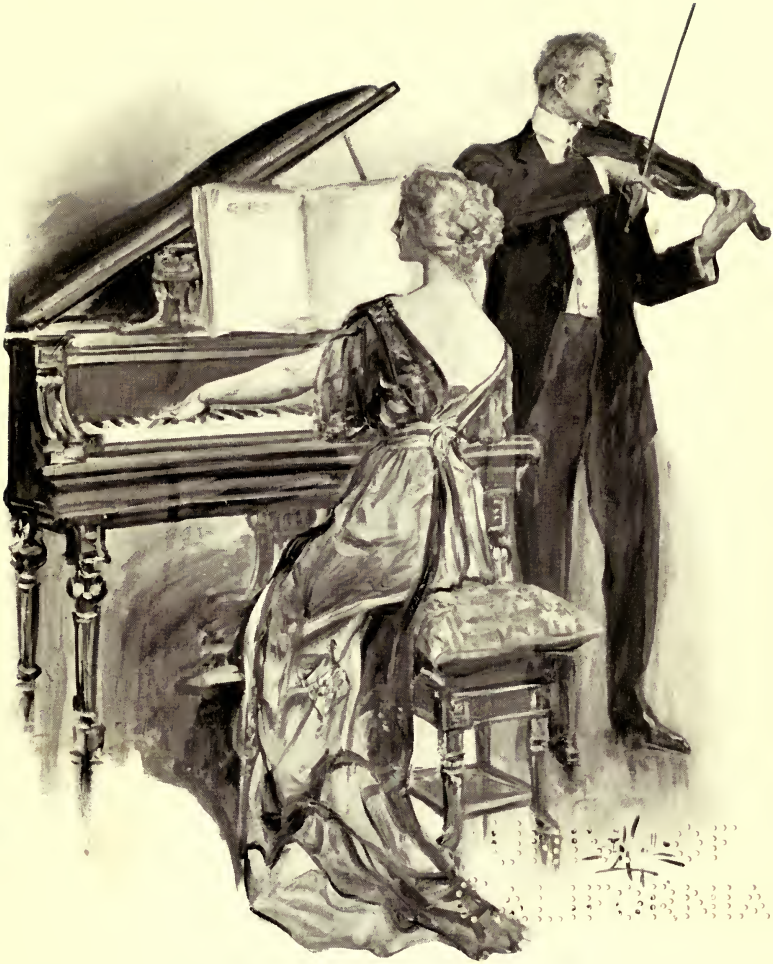
"We have been fortunate to keep him so long," she said, enveloping Matt in a look of tender scrutiny. "And, oh, for six years, always so good, so loyal, so true-hearted gentleman—surely never was another like our capitan."

Matt ought to have replied, but he could find no words.

"The world calls him," murmured John Mort. "A desert isle and a pair of hermits—after all, who can blame him!"

"No, not the world," protested Mirovna quickly. "It is love—a woman—every man must have that. But he will find her, and win her, and bring her back to us—and, oh, so happy we shall be, and I shall be sister to her, and the capitan must get her just the same size like me, so she can wear my stockings, and everything I have. He know all my size, that dear capitan, like faithful lover or French maid—so he had better take tape when he go courting, and measure young lady very careful."

The laugh that greeted this sally was a little constrained, for already the shadow of parting hung over them all, and each dreaded the farewells that so soon must be said. After more desultory talk, half reminiscent and tremulously gay, Matt rose from his place at Mirovna's feet, and stood there, painfully conscious that the moment had come. Mirovna and John Mort rose also with sad formality.



When once the violin had touched his chin he became a different man

"I have one favor to ask, before I go," said Matt somewhat huskily, "just one favor. Onáe," he went on, addressing Mort by his kanaka title, "will you not get your violin—that wonderful violin—and you, Masiofu Miriovina, take your seat at the piano—so that my last picture of you both may be as I have always loved you best, with your music following me out into the night?"

John Mort glowed at the request; the poetic fancy of it touching him to the quick. He drew the violin from its case, his face transfigured, his eyes scintillating and impassioned, as he gave a few swift strokes of the bow to test the tuning.

"Music is the only language—the divine language," he exclaimed, "and how far surpassing the stupid commonplace of words! Captain, you are a thousand times right; and all our affection for you, all our sorrow—all our unuttered hopes and prayers for you, will find their voice in what I play."

When once the violin had touched his chin, John Mort became a different man. He was strangely ennobled; the glamour of his genius lent dignity and beauty to his gaunt frame; his thin, haggard, deeply lined face took on a new expression, so rapt, so inspired, that he might have been in communion with another world. That night he played as Matt had never heard him play before, with an intensity, a fire, an unendurable pathos that wrung the soul. He had taken as a motive one of those simple, plaintive German folk-songs, passing from improvisa-

tion to improvisation till it seemed the cry of all suffering, doomed humanity. Mirovna, herself a brilliant musician, was quick and apt in following, and to Matt's untrained ear marvelously responsive and marvelously perfect. For a while she strove to keep him in her glance, as though loath to miss his going; but as the violin taxed her with increasing severity she had to forego everything in the absorption of keeping pace with it, and thus it was that Matt went unseen, unnoticed, his eyes suffused with tears—to linger for a moment under the moonlight before he could make up his mind to turn his back for ever.

An hour later he was aboard the *North Star,* and the rustling land-breeze was bearing him out of the lagoon on the long slant north. Six years of his life were sinking with the palms, behind him.

CHAPTER III

RESCUE AT SEA

EXTRACT from the *San Francisco Chronicle* of January 24, 1904:

RESCUE AT SEA

Among the passengers yesterday on board the incoming Oceanic S. S. Co.'s *Mariposa* was Captain Broughton and nine South Sea Islanders, of the schooner *North Star,* capsized in north lat. 34, west long. 132, during a heavy squall. Captain Broughton was below at the time, and hardly managed to scramble out of his cabin before the ship went over. The disaster is ascribed to the carelessness of the kanaka crew, who were all asleep at the moment the squall struck the vessel, which was lying becalmed with her sails up.

The crew, none of whom was drowned, contrived to perch themselves on the ship's bottom, and after four days of intense suffering were picked up by the *W. H. Hall,* of this city, in lumber for Suva, Fiji. The *Hall,* in her turn, transferred them to the mail steamer, which was fortunately intercepted a week later.

Captain Broughton can not speak too highly of the extreme kindness of Captain Hayward, Purser

Smith, and the officers and passengers of the *Mariposa* toward himself and his crew. A concert was given in aid of the shipwrecked mariners, and the sum of $318.75 realized on their behalf.

The *North Star* was of seventy-four tons register, built at Bath, Maine, in 1884, and carried no insurance. It was learned from Captain Broughton that she had been employed in the coprah trade for many years, and was on her way to this port for dry-docking and repairs. Western bound ship-masters are warned to look out for the derelict, which was still afloat when last sighted.

CHAPTER IV

THE RUBY RING

THE loss of the *North Star,* together with the coin in the ship's safe, cost Matt between eighteen and twenty thousand dollars. The vessel had not been insured, owing to the troublesome and prying questions that would have been asked, which, if truthfully answered, would have invalidated the policy. Had it not been for the ruby ring on his finger, and his portion of the small sum raised by the passengers of the *Mariposa,* he would have landed in San Francisco utterly penniless. As it was, his crew and he became dependent on a seamen's charitable institution. While others had talked and telephoned, and promised vague assistance, leaving the poor castaways shivering on the wharf in a circle of newspaper men and photographers, it was the Reverend John Thompson, crisply English and bustlingly practical, who descended on them, checked off their names in a note-book, and led them away like so many sheep.

After a night under this kindly but somewhat austere roof, Matt sneaked away in the morning to try to pawn his ring. He hated to part with it, yet what else was he to do? He had not even an overcoat, and here it was January and piercingly cold;

he had nothing—not a tooth-brush, not a spare shirt. His preoccupation, however, was more to avoid being cheated in the disposal of the ring, for though he had little knowledge of jewels, the stone seemed to him of unusual fire and purity, and evidently very valuable.

He determined to pick out the biggest and most fashionable jewelry store, and, explaining his position, ask the favor of their expert advice. They might be obliging enough to tell him what the gem was worth, and thus help him materially. Matt knew San Francisco well, and accordingly chose Snood and Hargreaves for his objective. His entrance, which he attempted to make as inconspicuous as possible, caused an undercurrent of commotion in this splendid establishment. As he paused at a case of napkin rings, nerving himself for a further advance into the glittering stronghold, he was bumped into by a passing gentleman, and as he was receiving the apologies of the passing gentleman a hand from behind felt for a possible revolver or bomb in his rear pocket. It was all so quickly and coolly done that Matt had hardly time to realize he was under suspicion. A large mirror gave him the clue, for there, at full length, he saw what a deeply-tanned, wild-haired, ragged desperado he appeared; and saw also, with the tail of his eye, a scurry of pale employees to guard the exits and block his escape.

Flushing to the eyes, more with shame than anger,

and still closely followed by the store detective, he made his way to the nearest clerk.

"I am Captain Broughton, of the shipwrecked schooner *North Star,*" he explained. "All I had went down with my ship, except this ring, and I should be glad to get some idea of its value so that the pawnbrokers can't cheat me."

"It's hardly in our line," snapped the clerk. "Expert valuation is a business in itself, and—"

The conversation was interrupted by a bald, oldish man, who, with an air of authority, demanded to know what was the matter. On its being explained, he took up the ring, looked at it with some surprise, and asked Matt if he belonged to the people that had been rescued at sea by the mail steamer.

"Yes," said Matt smiling, "and though appearances are against me, I am neither one of the James brothers nor a bandit."

The man thawed at this, and requested Matt to step into his private office.

"I am Mr. Snood," he said, "the managing partner of this concern." As soon as they were inside the office and seated, Mr. Snood examined the ring carefully.

"Where did you get this?" he asked suddenly, raising his keen eyes to Matt's face.

"It was given to me."

"Permit me to inquire by whom?"

"My employer—the gentleman whose ship I lost."

"Why did he give it to you?"

"I was leaving his service. I had been associated with him for years. He held me in very great esteem and made me a present of the ring on my departure."

"He's a very rich man—this employer?"

"Oh, yes—very rich indeed."

"Then you have no reason to doubt that this ring was—er—legitimately acquired?"

"No one who knew him could ever doubt that. Why, it would be utterly incredible."

"You must pardon me for asking these questions," went on Mr. Snood in a kinder tone. "It's a good plan to be careful, you know. After all, it is to your own interest as well as ours, isn't it?"

"Quite so," assented Matt, hoping that Mr. Snood would soon come to the point.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said the latter, hesitating, and examining the ring again with evident admiration. "Mind, I'm not saying you mightn't get a better offer elsewhere, but this is the best Snood and Hargreaves can do for you. We'll advance you four thousand dollars on it at seven per cent. interest, and we'll engage to buy it outright, now or later, for fifty-five hundred dollars."

This was so much more than Matt had ever dreamed of, that he could only gasp. Fifty-five hundred dollars! He had thought vaguely of a couple of thousand, trembling at his own presumption. Fifty-five hundred dollars! Why, that was a fortune! Not that he wished to sell the ring except in

the last extremity; nor, as he bewilderingly considered the proposal, did he care to take so large an advance as four thousand. The interest charges would soon grow beyond his powers to meet them, and the ring would be irretrievably lost. Explaining his perplexities to Mr. Snood, it was finally agreed that he was to be advanced a thousand dollars only, with the privilege of selling the ring at any time he wished for the larger sum.

A little later he left the store with fifty twenty-dollar gold pieces weighing down his pockets, and the following memorandum pinned carefully inside his waistcoat:

"San Francisco, January 24, 1904.

"Messrs. Snood & Hargreaves hereby acknowledge the receipt of a solitaire ruby ring, of an antique, Oriental setting, from its owner, Captain Matthew Broughton, who, in consideration of one thousand ($1,000) dollars, advanced to him to-day by Messrs. S. & H. on security of said ring, and receipt by Captain Broughton hereby acknowledged, agrees to pay S. & H. seven per cent. interest, semi-annually on said loan.

"George H. Snood,
For Snood & Hargreaves.
"Matthew Broughton."

Matt returned to the windy street in far better spirits than he had left it. He had a thousand dollars in his pockets; four thousand five hundred more to draw on if need be; and best of all he could now "go home." It was a strange instinct that called him

back to Manaswan, for there was not a single tie that bound him to the place unless it were his mother's grave. But after years of wandering, of contented exile, of acquiescence in the life he had made for himself, something within him had at last revolted. Homesick, heartsick, weary of palms and reefs and naked savages, Manaswan appeared to him as the solution of this subtle malady of the soul. At Manaswan a miracle would happen, and he would be happy. The first use he made of his money was to buy his ticket.

He gave the clergyman five hundred dollars to assure the safe return of the natives to their various islands; and that afternoon the honest, devoted fellows, in charge of nine-year-old Master Thompson, accompanied him across the bay to cheer his departure on the Overland. Standing there in a line of nine, marshalled by that little white boy, they presented a singular spectacle on the platform, what with the earrings in their ears, two with tattooed faces, and all weeping copiously. Nor was the effect diminished by their singing a resounding hymn, and then listening, with bowed heads, to the prayer Tanielu, the Tongan, offered up amid the jostle of trunks and passengers. Matt's own eyes were dim as the train moved away, and there was a very real lump in his throat. Why was he going to Manaswan while everything he valued lay behind him? Why was he leaving tried and true friends for strangers? An island fairyland for a prim little Connecticut

town? Yet his resolution did not waver, and he was inspirited by the thought that in five days he would be "home."

CHAPTER V

THE KANAKA KING

MATT was less disillusioned by his birthplace than might have been expected. The snowy landscape, the sluggish river with its frozen shallows, the icicled and silent pines, the delight of hearing sleigh-bells and watching the bright animation of scenes so long unfamiliar—all were satisfying to the craving that possessed him. On the human side, however, Manaswan was disappointing; no one seemed to care particularly whether he had come back or not; the most cordial greeting he received came from an old gentleman who mistook him for some one else. In fact, Matt remembered Manaswan a great deal better than Manaswan remembered him; and when he wrote to Washington and learned that both his uncle and aunt had long been dead, he felt lonelier than ever.

Matt took up his quarters in Mrs. Sattane's boarding-house on Jefferson Avenue, and fell into an aimless, drifting sort of life, in which the dinner-bell was the most important part of the day. He took long tramps, assiduously read the daily paper, interested himself in the other boarders, and vaguely turned over schemes for his future. With forty-five hundred dollars he could surely make some kind of

start somewhere. But what precise form of "start" and what "somewhere"? Matt put civilization in review, and was both dismayed and attracted. The Islands had no very great prizes, nor any great downfalls, but here was a country with the evidences of both on every hand. He had been so long away from it that it was almost as novel to him as it might be to a kanaka. It struck him as terribly ruthless, yet very agreeable for those on top. It was his business to crowd in somewhere with his forty-five hundred dollars and shove his way forward; everybody in civilization was shoving determinedly; Matt watched the battle from the security of Mrs. Sattane's boarding-house, and tried to nerve himself for his own entrance into the fight.

Meanwhile he smoked his pipe and made friends with the other boarders. The principal of these was Hunter Hoyt, a genial, fat old scamp of fifty, never altogether sober, though varyingly drunk, who, in his palmy days, had been a sensational journalist of some celebrity in the newspaper world of New York and San Francisco. Drink had been his ruin, and he had declined to do reporter work for the local Manaswan paper, the *Banner*. Shabby, jolly, and always with a flower in his buttonhole, and a pleasant (if often inarticulate) word for everybody, Hoyt was one of those irresistible nuisances who are popular when better men are not. He never paid Mrs. Sattane more than half his bill; his engagement with the *Banner* was almost in the nature of

alms to fallen greatness; the liquor dealers allowed him to fine them an incalculable number of bottles of whisky; even the flower he was so particular about was never paid for, except by an amiable condescension that Signor Tony Frendo perforce accepted in lieu of cash. There was everywhere a contemptuous affection for the old scallawag, whose courtly ways and husky compliments made him an especial favorite of the women.

Hunter Hoyt took an instant fancy to Matt, and in many ways, some of them pathetic enough, sought to win his regard. It was a proof of how lonely Matt was that he received these whiskified advances not without gratitude, and grew to look forward to that nightly talk in the ex-great man's sanctum. This was a small, threadbare room, walled about with dozens of photographs, most of them signed with illustrious names—actresses, divas, statesmen, men of science, poets and what not—who bore witness to Hoyt's bygone glory. A ratty old Navajo blanket was supposed to transform the bed into a "divan"; similar artifices concealed, though meagerly, the domestic nature of the chamber; when it was filled with tobacco smoke, and the penetrating reek of bad spirits, no spot ever more deserved the appellation of "den"—Hunter Hoyt's invariable term for it—with an accompanying air that implied a whole suite, of which this was the cherished corner.

In spite of his decadence there were often times when he could be both clever and entertaining; when

with the right level of whisky in his sodden old carcass he could regain his former powers, and astonish one with his mocking, humorous, brilliant flow of talk. It was then that contempt changed to admiration; and intimacy followed. Except in regard to John Mort, Matt kept nothing back from the old fellow, who was insatiable in his questions and as fascinated by the younger man's past as any boy.

Matt had no conception of what a picturesque figure he was to those watery, bleared old eyes, nor how sincerely Hunter Hoyt adored him. As for his own looks, he had long ceased to give them much thought; at thirty-one most men have outgrown that; he was scarcely aware that his fine, sensitive face was recovering the color it had lost in the tropics, or that his vigorous frame and broad shoulders and wavy, clustering black hair were likely to attract favorable attention. The key to his whole character, and the underlying cause of his charming manners, could be found in the modest estimate he had of himself. The principal endeavor of the naval academy is to teach the midshipman he is a person of very small importance; who is to do what he is told, keep his mouth shut, and respect the flag—and Matt had not wholly outlived this youthful training which had been put in his bones to stay.

In contrast to Hunter Hoyt, the rest of Mrs. Sattane's boarders seemed commonplace indeed. Mrs. Sattane herself was a careworn, middle-aged woman, with a quelling smile and a tendency to

moan over the horrors in the daily paper. She would pass over columns of political and general news to pounce, with tremulous zest, on some obscure paragraph headed: "Laborer Boiled Alive in Soap Vat," or "Girl Candy Maker Loses Entire Scalp," or "Night Riders Whip Fainting Woman."

Mr. Price and Mr. Goldstein, two grinning young clerks who shared a room together, nicknamed her "Moaning Mary," and found a never-failing entertainment at the breakfast-table in inventing lurid items of this character and reciting imaginary headlines aloud. They considered themselves amply rewarded afterward at supper as "Moaning Mary" would peevishly remark: "I couldn't find that piece about the horrible railroad accident."

"Why, that's funny, Mrs. Sattane, it was there all right."

"Sure it was there," Goldstein would confirm, giggling. "Think of the poor little mites all squashed up like custard."

"The locomotive plunged through sixty of them, and they had to pick little arms and legs off the cowcatcher," Mr. Price might add, making half the company his confederates with a wink. "The headlight was all splashed with blood and curls; wasn't it, Goldy?"

If Mrs. Sattane then emitted that familiar, quavering moan, the two young men were happy for the rest of the evening.

Another inmate was a night train-despatcher

named Smith, who slept all day under the attic—a heavy-shouldered, heavy-lidded, stooping man, who seldom spoke to any one, and always had a private stock of bananas. There was a Miss Gibbs, a dry, thin, weather-beaten female in the sour forties, who drove off every morning in a rattletrap buggy to give music lessons in the farm-houses. A venerable, tottering old gray horse named Buggins furnished the motive power for this daily pursuit of Miss Gibbs' bread and butter, and was a great deal more popular with the boarders than Miss Gibbs herself. Buggins, when not busy, lived in an outhouse, though what he lived *on* was a source of perplexity. Miss Gibbs said that the farmers fed him as part of her arrangement with their daughters, which, even if true, left Buggins somewhat in the air on Sundays and holidays. The general impression was that he got nothing but potato peelings and what nourishment could be extracted from licking plates at the kitchen window. Mrs. Crowther, the undertaker's wife, used to give Buggins an occasional lump of sugar, or a bit of bread, earning with this economical outlay the character of a philanthropist and a passionate lover of animals.

The Crowthers did not live in the house, but pedalled there on bicycles for their meals, usually arriving late and quarrelsome. Mr. Crowther was a dull, sickly man, with a fluffy, capable little blond wife very much his junior, who had a decisive way of contradicting everything he said. Crowther was

comparatively well off, with a large and comfortable apartment above his "parlors" on the main street of Manaswan; but on account of his occupation, and the coffins in his window—not to dwell on more horrifying things elsewhere—he was unable to keep a servant, and the pair was thus forced to become "mealers" at the table of others. It was a matter of constant recrimination between them that Mrs. Crowther would not do her own housework, and the boarders were often induced to take sides in this and other disagreements—which the boarders did with the recklessness of fools rushing in where angels should fear to tread.

The last of the boarders was too humble a creature to call himself a boarder at all. Matt lived a week at Mrs. Sattane's before he even discovered the man's existence—a grave, elderly mulatto of a kindly, open face and ingratiating manners, who was something in the nature of the boarding-house skeleton. His name was Daggancourt—a possible corruption of De Goncourt—Victor Daggancourt—who, although he paid seven dollars a week, while the others paid only five, had what might be called a furtive position in the house. He would wait unobtrusively about the porch until the rest had finished their meal, when a second tinkle of the bell would summon him to the disordered table. Here color prejudice forbade that he should be served by Bridget, who placed the dishes near his plate and left him to shift for himself. The sitting-room was

of course forbidden to him, though he might linger for a moment in the doorway, without impropriety, and listen to the superior race. He was the owner of a small garage and machine-shop—"Victor's Garage" it was called—and was a widower without children.

Matt first made his acquaintance in Buggins' shed, where he happened to find him feeding the old horse oats out of a newspaper. Victor explained, somewhat apologetically, that he was "tuning up the hay motor," and begged Matt not to mention it to the others. "It might seem like criticizing Miss Gibbs," he said, patting Buggins' neck; "she has a pretty hard time to get along, having to wear gloves, and be a lady on half nothing, and go out in all weathers, rain or shine—and if Buggins gets kind of lost in the shuffle she oughtn't to be blamed too much."

In the course of further conversation over a cigar, Matt learned that the mulatto kept a sack of oats in the garage, and was accustomed to bring Buggins a nightly allowance. "Just a little dope to hearten him up and keep him from tumbling to pieces," said Daggancourt, with his quiet smile. "This is a hard world for a colored man, sir," he went on seriously, warmed by Matt's commendation, " 'specially if he's better educated than the most of his race, and is given to thinking a little, like I do. The majority of them are no company for me, with their common ways and cheap ideas; and of course I am *personum non grata* to white folks. Here I am, stuck middle-

wise between the two, and when I'm tired of my books and my flute I just come around and talk to Buggins. He don't draw any color-line, Buggins don't, and I guess he'd rather see me than the king of England."

Matt saw more of Daggancourt after that, usually under the benignant ægis of Buggins, and in time conceived a sincere regard for the old fellow, whose lowly, effacing life was not without a certain tragedy. There was a fine strain in the mulatto, and an innate dignity and kindness that commanded respect, not to speak of a whimsical humor that gleamed out even in his most earnest moments. "You're a man," he once said to Matt, "while I have the misfortune to be a Problem. That's a bigger difference between us than color itself. The darky can't go anywhere and do anything, but right off, he's a Problem. When we eat, we're a Problem; when we go to a hospital, we're a Problem; we can't hop on a train but there again we're a Problem; when we die, we're a Problem, for, Lord save us, black bones mustn't lay next to white; and I guess it goes right up to the pearly gates with us, Problems still, and the poor cherubim is bothered to know what to do with us!"

Matt snuggled into Mrs. Sattane's boarding-house as though he intended to live there the rest of his days. He did not seem able to see beyond, or make any plans, but drifted along as purposeless as a cork in a stream, not exactly happy nor exactly un-

happy, but somehow spent, and with a sense of waiting for his energies to revive. It was so cold outside of Mrs. Sattane's, and so sleepily hot inside, and there appeared to be such a multitude of ways of investing four thousand, five hundred dollars, and losing it.

Nothing could be got from the boarders except warnings. Crowther said that undertaking was "fascinating," but there was "no money in it." Hunter Hoyt said that newspapers ate up promising young men and then spat out the bones. Price and Goldstein, vehement socialists, announced that the day of the small man was over, and predicted an immediate era of blood, when the "proletariat" were going to rise on the "bourgeoisie." Matt, who did not know what either of the words meant, was depressed by the information. On appealing to Victor the latter foretold the swift finish of the garage business. "Owners are getting to know too much," he said; "you can't sell a ten-dollar pair of gas lights for sixty, like you did once. If I was you, Marse' Broughton, I'd try mules. There never has been enough mules, and there never will be!"

Matt accordingly, though rather slackly, it must be confessed, began to look into mules; he accumulated stacks of mule information; he wrote to Washington and got for nothing the concentrated wisdom of a whole mule sub-bureau. The sub-bureau, like Victor, was enthusiastic for mules, more mules, unlimited mules; and hastened to supply,

under a mistaken impression that Matt had already laid his hand to the task, sample blank forms for pedigreeing unborn mules. Then the War Department, getting wind of a mule raiser, applied for mules, specifying with extraordinary exactness the precise weight, height, and age of the mules they required, submitting blank forms again for sealed bids.

All this was very encouraging, and was made more so by Victor's request to come in as a partner. He thought he could sell out his garage for fourteen or sixteen hundred dollars, and volunteered to be Matt's man Friday.

"I won't be any trouble to you," he pleaded earnestly. "I know my place, and I'll keep it, no matter how close we have to live; and I'll cook, and wash, and do everything till we're on our feet."

Matt did not commit himself; it was so much easier to dawdle along and coquette with imaginary mules, and work out imaginary mule profits, than to bestir himself with actualities. Mrs. Sattane's was like a sort of feather-bed to him, and he hated to get up. But the idea of a log cabin, set picturesquely in blue Kentucky hills, was not without a strong attraction. Here, waited on by the faithful Victor, like a person in a play, and surrounded by those valuable animals of which the world could never get enough, he saw a vision of himself, content at last, and with that dull, underlying heartache gone for ever. He had a dream, too, of some decayed, lost

southern mansion, the perishing relic of before-the-war greatness, where, one day, stopping on his horse for a drink of water, the slender, lovely daughter of the house would look up into his eyes, and— Oh, yes, mules by all means!

One day, after breakfast, while he was in his room, he was called down to the parlor by the only visitor that had ever sought him. Such an unheard-of event put him in a flutter, and he ran down the stairs two steps at a time, hoping that it was an old South Sea acquaintance, or, better still, one of his boyhood chums at Annapolis. But the grizzled, smiling man who rose to greet him was a stranger, and there was no flare-up of recognition on either side.

"I'm the editor of the Manaswan *Banner,*" said the stranger, introducing himself deferentially. "Tom Maynard, my name is, and a very injured man, Mr. Broughton! Yes, sir, a very injured man, for surely the local paper had the first call on a local boy? Oh, Lord!" he ejaculated in the same key of pretended indignation, "to think you were hiding here all this time, and I didn't know a thing about it!"

"I don't understand," said Matt, smiling too. "What's this all about, anyway?"

"And so you are a real live king," went on Mr. Maynard, ignoring the question, and gazing at him in humorous awe. "What a lot of stick-in-the-muds it makes us feel that one of our boys could go out

and do that, while we stayed at home with the chores."

"King?" cried Matt. "I don't know what you're talking about. You're mistaken—who said I was a king?"

"Now, it's no good putting me off like that," said Mr. Maynard. "If it's in the New York *Clarion* first, it has to be in the Manaswan *Banner* second. It wouldn't be fair if you didn't give us second place, considering you were born and raised here, and owe that much to the town. I've got a crackerjack stenographer waiting in the office, two typists, and the operator's holding the wire for the Associated Press, so get your hat, and come along quick, like a good chap."

"I wish you would tell me what you're talking about," exclaimed Matt, growing impatient. "Is your office in a lunatic asylum or where?"

"Then you haven't seen it?" asked Mr. Maynard, offended and incredulous, searching the younger man's face.

"Seen what?"

"The big front page Sunday story of the *Clarion* —the New York *Daily Clarion?"*

"Of course I haven't."

The editor, recovering his good-nature, drew a newspaper from his overcoat pocket, and flattened it out with his hand.

"There it is," he said.

The staring scare-heads swam before Matt's eyes.

Good heavens, what was all this? He plumped into a chair, holding the paper as though it were a bomb, and feeling as though he were being pilloried naked before the world. The smaller type was lost in a blur, a sentence only caught here and there, but the most danced before him as unintelligible as Sanskrit.

HAIL TO THE KING!
ROYAL BROUGHTON RETURNS TO CHILDHOOD'S HOME

KING OF THE KANAKAS HERE

PEARL ISLANDS AND DEEP WATER SHIPS FLY HIS FLAG IN FAR-OFF PACIFIC, WHILE COPPER-HUED SUBJECTS LOUT LOW TO MATTHEW FIRST.

ROMANTIC STORY OF MANASWAN BOY SHIPWRECKED IN LABYRINTHINE SEAS, AND HIS AMAZING RISE TO GREATNESS.

Would Murder Him for His Teeth.—Isles where Old Men's Beards Pass as Currency.—Palm Wine Jags, with Ten Thousand Savages on the Blink.—How the Christian Half of Tapatuea Massacred the Heathen Half.—Beachcombers, Pirates and Mysterious Characters.—Violinist who Held Attacking Cannibals Spellbound till Wind Saved the Becalmed Vessel.—Black Pearls and Goldlipped Shell.—Fungus, Beachdamar, Ambergris and Sharks' Fins.—Vast Lagoons Awaiting Modern Exploitation, but Matthew First Would Leave

Them as They Are.—His Majesty Only Smiles at Questions, and Remarks Significantly that He is Satisfied.—$200,000 Worth of Pearls in a Matchbox.—Royal Plans Uncertain, but Will Probably Remain Here a Few Months.—Say, Girls, Don't Any of You Want to Be a Queen?

Matt had scarcely reached the end when there was a violent commotion outside—horses galloping, men descending excitedly, the porch shaking with the tramp of feet, and pull, pull, pull at the bell as though the house were on fire. A second later a crowd of newspaper men and photographers surged into the room, spattering the carpet with mud and snow; a noisy, jostling throng in heavy overcoats, all demanding "the kanaka king."

"Me first, gentlemen," cried Maynard, grabbing Matt as though he were a bale of goods. "The king's mine till noon!"

"The dickens he is!" exclaimed one of the mob, elbowing up to Matt. "We're all in on this, aren't we, boys?"

"You bet we are," came from a dozen ready throats.

"Tell them they can all go to blazes," cried Maynard, tightening his hold on Matt. "They can't make you be interviewed if you won't."

"Open out there," shouted a photographer, letting up a blind with a crash.

"Ask him to stand up, George," cried another.

"Better flash him," added a third, busying himself with a sort of pistol. "Say, let's flash him!"

"Oh, do open out," wailed number one.

"Sorry to intrude on you like this, king," said the foremost reporter to Matt, planting a muscular dig in Mr. Maynard's anatomy and pressing him away. "Treat us right and we'll treat you right. Better go ahead and get it over with."

"Is it true you were expelled from the Naval Academy?" asked a voice.

"How did you get started in this king business?" inquired another.

"He's mine till noon," protested Maynard chokingly. "Mine till no—!"

"The *Times* would be grateful for a short, brief, signed description—"

"Do open out there!" bleated the photographer.

Matt rose, speechless with rage, and, tearing himself clear, strode to the door and up to his bedroom. Here with a bang he locked himself in, the whole pack pounding at his heels like school boys after a runaway.

"I'm not a king," he roared through at them. "There's not a word of truth in that idiotic article. The first fellow that breaks down my door will get his head punched!"

It was fully half an hour before they descended, disheartened and growling, to bundle into their sleighs and depart. "Three hoots for that damned king!" cried one of them, trying to lead off, but his

suggestion met with no response, and the jingling bells drowned his solitary effort.

A little later there was a shuffling, lumbering sound outside Matt's door, and Hoyt's husky voice came through the keyhole.

"Shay, ole man, you aren't angry with me, are you? Good joke, dresh it up a bit and git fif' dollarsh! Didn't mean any harm—shole and honor, didn't mean any harm. Great newspaper stuff, shat story. Royal Broughton returnsh to childhood's home, and I got fif' dollarsh for it. Come along and painsh town red—come along, you old stiff!"

CHAPTER VI

A VOICE AT THE TELEPHONE

THE Manaswan *Banner* printed the *Clarion* tale in full, and by that one issue lifted Matt from obscurity to local greatness. People stared at him on the street; children ran backward, pointing at him; tradesmen rained cards; Matt could not enter a store but there was a scurry to wait on him. Denials were useless; the whole boarding-house, loyally pledged to disseminate truth and radiate contradiction, were forced to avow their failure. Price, Goldstein and Daggancourt were brought into daily contact with half the population, yet the public refused to be undeceived. The public did not wish to be corrected. The public wanted romance, and clung to it with both hands, like the overgrown baby it is; the public would not permit Matt to be dethroned—even by himself.

Matt's own appearance contributed not a little to the deception. Men who have led adventurous lives on the frontiers of civilization usually get a peculiar stamp—a peculiar and marked individuality. Matt was not only good-looking, but there was something unusual, attractive, and even distinguished about him. It was impossible for any one to "place" Matt;

the local Sherlock Holmeses were always baffled; he fitted into no class, and yet had an "air." This capacity to rouse interest—favorable interest—is a human possession of great value. It has also, of course, its drawbacks. When the *Banner* raised Matt to kingship Manaswan was thrilled but not altogether surprised. Manaswan had long been aware "that he was somebody out of the way."

One result of the grotesque fiction was to bring Matt into contact with some of the better families of the place. The Cleghorns, the Randalls, the Russells and the Bucks—all in some manner or other contrived to scrape acquaintance with him. These social overtures, made first out of sheer curiosity, and in most instances inspired by the women, opened to Matt a number of pleasant, if somewhat stiff and old-fashioned, households. And he was led, finally, into the extravagance of buying evening clothes and began to cut a modest dash in Manaswan society.

It wasn't the best society, however. There was an upper crust still, to which the Cleghorns, the Randalls, the Russells and the Bucks were as houris outside the gates. In this higher realm were the Marshalls—the old general and his daughter—who rode thoroughbred horses and lived within a vast park; the Derwents, owners of the shoe factories; the Bells, and others—an aristocracy of wealth, and compactly exclusive. The old general had been American minister to half the courts of Europe and

was described as very "grand." Lamont, the millionaire wheel-manufacturer, was also very "grand." There were also the "grand" Doolittles and the "grand" Bells. When a houri said "grand," the superlative was reached.

Matt enjoyed the homespun gaieties to which he was now so often invited—the candy-pullings, the parties where they played games, the jolly sleigh-rides and suppers. They offered him a more enlivening companionship than he found in the boarding-house, which in contrast grew drearier every day, till its fly-specked walls took on the aspect of a morgue. The girlish laughter was sweet to hear; the general cordiality and good-will very warming—though it was all extraordinarily strait-laced in some respects. Dancing was barred; Cromwell's Ironsides could not have been more aggressively pious; nobody smoked, nor, great heavens, drank "liquor!" Yet with this there was a freedom no less extraordinary. Chaperons were unheard of; kissing was brisk and unashamed; the romping games appeared to Matt often very indecorous. There was an Early-Christian atmosphere over the whole, a simplicity and rural innocence that was as charming as it was trying. Matt, in spite of himself, was always shocking somebody; the fact of his not being a church-member was in itself shocking; his path lay over egg-shells, and they were continually cracking beneath him. There loomed before him a dreaded day, when he should either have to join the Re-

formed Methodist Episcopal Church or be cast bodily from the vineyard.

Meanwhile, the *Clarion* story was being carried far and wide. It came back to him from everywhere, tangibly evident in letters. Every morning there was a substantial mail, which was at once both an exasperation and a delight. Here are a few samples taken at random from that daily pile beside his plate:

"Dear Sir:

"Having read of you in the Chicago *Record-Herald,* I respectfully desire to bring to your attention our unrivaled line of diving and marine apparatus, which, if you will kindly glance at the accompanying catalogue—"

"Matthew First,

"Honored Sir:

"Am a young man in Boston Express Co., driving delivery wagon, but would like to exchange into your service, salary no object if could be captain of your guard, or similar confidential position. When I opened the *Transcript* and seen your romantic story I decided to apply right off—"

"Dear King:

"Noticing the account in the New Orleans *Picayune,* and learning you intended to make some stay in this country before returning to your island home, I thought perhaps you might care to buy a 36-foot power-boat, only 3 years old, hardwood finish, nice w. c., 16 h. p. Snipkin engine, that I should be glad to sacrifice at a bargain—"

"DARLING MATTHEW:

"I am only a high-school girl, but I loved you the moment I took up the *Deseret News* and found you was looking for a queen. I'm afraid I'm not very pretty, but if a loving, faithful heart—"

"Mr. Matthew Broughton,

"DEAR MR. BROUGHTON:

"May I take the liberty of asking if you are a Sun Worshipper? Or, if this ideal religion has not been brought to your attention, could you not at least find room on one of your lovely isles for a small colony of S. W's., who desire to discard their clothes and attain that simplicity and beauty of existence they find so difficult, nay, so hopeless, here. We number thirty-two, mostly ladies, and in the hope of a favorable answer, enclose a stamped and addressed envelope. Yours in the R. Z.,

"(MISS) HELEN DORMER.

"P. S.: We would be very willing to pay a small rent, either in cash or early vegetables, or supply one or two of our number in rotation as nurses, educators, etc., to those noble, simple people who have elevated you to their throne. H. D."

Matt made no reply to any of these epistles. His money was ebbing fast enough as it was—frighteningly fast—and he was in no humor to squander any of it on useless stamps and note paper. The arrival of spring, Daggancourt's lengthening face, the imminence of the Reformed Methodist Episcopal Church—all hastened his resolution to leave Manaswan, and pay a flying visit to Kentucky to spy out

the land. The mules were calling, and it was time for dreams to become realities! Daggancourt would have bought a pair in Manaswan, loaded their joint effects on a wagon, and started off. But Matt was not such a burner of bridges. He would prudently inspect mule-territory and mule-conditions, and then return with well-formulated mule-plans.

While nerving himself to depart, and putting it off from day to day, on one excuse or another, he wrote to Snood and Hargreaves, the San Francisco jewelers, saying that he had made up his mind to part with the ring, and requesting them to remit him the four thousand, five hundred dollars by express, deducting whatever interest had accrued. It was not without a pang that he dropped this letter into the box; it marked the knell of those easy-going days at Mrs. Sattane's; it had now to be mules in earnest, with hard work and frugal living, and evening clothes put away perhaps for ever.

He spun out his farewell calls, dilly-dallied, held back all he could, but at last the inexorable morning arrived. Daggancourt was there in an automobile; Matt's suit-case, packed to bursting, stood ready on the porch, together with a large brown paper package of the overflow; his pockets bulged with hard-boiled eggs and sandwiches; and never was a man more apparently destined for instant departure—when the telephone bell suddenly rang and Bridget came rushing out to say that Mr. Doty wanted Mr. Broughton on the wire.

At the moment it seemed an intolerable infliction. Mr. Doty was the Reformed Methodist Episcopal clergyman, a mild creature of an anxious cordiality, whose acquaintance with Matt was of the slightest. Matt took up the receiver with the intention of making short work of the reverend gentleman, an intention emphasized by the honk of Victor's horn, imperiously bidding him to hurry.

"Hello," he said.

"Oh, Mr. Broughton," returned Doty, "this is just to remind you of our church social to-morrow night, tickets twenty-five cents, including hat check, and to say I simply can not take a refusal. Please tell me that you will come."

"Come!" cried Matt. "Why, I'm leaving this minute for Kentucky!"

"Put it off, then," protested Doty. "I have a special reason—a very special reason for wishing you to come. Indeed, I must make my request imperative. Oh, Mr. Broughton, refuse me if you like, but do not say no to one of the sweetest and most gracious of our young patricians."

"Can't help it," exclaimed Matt curtly. "Sorry to disappoint you, but really—"

"Mayn't I try to persuade you, Mr. Broughton?" said a new voice in his ear—a girlish voice with the indescribable cadence of good breeding. "I've been counting so much on meeting you to-morrow night—in fact, I only agreed to come for that reason."

Matt's own tone softened.

"Do tell me who you are?" he asked. "I oughtn't even to wait for that, but I'm too flattered not to."

"I'm Miss Marshall," she replied. "General Marshall's daughter, you know—or, I suppose you don't know, though—"

"Miss Marshall!" cried Matt, dazzled at the name. "I had no idea I was talking to angels unawares. Of course I know you, in a far-off, cat-looking-at-king sort of way. Who doesn't!"

" I know *you* better than that," she returned gaily. "Let me count—yes, it's five times I've seen you, and once I was so close to you in the music-store that I might have touched you. I am sorry I didn't now —hold out my hand, I mean—but it's a world where people are too easily misunderstood, isn't it? And here we are, like ships that pass in the night—with you going to Kentucky. Must you really go to Kentucky, Mr. Broughton?"

"I'm afraid I have to."

"Does that mean you've found Manaswan horribly dull? But of course it does. People only stay here who have to—like barnacles on a rock."

"I don't know—I've liked it well enough," stammered Matt, "though you make me ashamed to admit it. I think I'm sorry to leave the old place—specially now."

"To me it seems deadly," continued the girl. "It's the Siberia of America without the excitement of chains or fresh prisoners to brighten us up—not a single person of the slightest interest till you ap-

peared. Do you know, Mr. Broughton, you express the only bit of romance that has ever come our way?"

"Oh, no, no," protested Matt. "All I am is another kind of barnacle from another kind of rock, and just as commonplace as the rest of them, I'm afraid."

"But even that is so interesting," went on Miss Marshall encouragingly. "A strange, remote barnacle from the South Pacific—dear me, how perfectly delightful! Besides, they say you are a king out there."

"Oh, Miss Marshall, I am really glad to go on account of all that rubbish; you can't imagine what a bore it has been, what a detestable mortification. I need hardly tell you it is all newspaper stuff—not a word of it that isn't a silly lie."

Matt stopped, trying to nerve himself for an heroic admission. Somehow it seemed suddenly important that he should be honest—that he should free himself from any meretricious glamour.

"The prosaic truth is that I'm going to Kentucky to raise mules," he added.

"Mules?"

"Yes, mules."

"But can't you do that here?"

"Well, you see, the book says—"

"The book?"

"I don't know anything about them—so naturally I bought a book."

The merriment of the half-caught reply was rather wounding.

"Oh, it is not so absurd as it sounds," he said. "I have a sort of partner, too—a practical colored man."

"A practical colored man?"

"Yes, a kind of Man Friday who has attached himself to me. We are going to pool our money and build a log cabin in the mountains."

There was a moment's pause at the other end of the telephone, followed by suppressed laughter.

"That settles it, Mr. Broughton, you simply must come," exclaimed the young lady. "Please tell me that you will."

Matt listened eagerly as she laughed again, and then struck his flag. The sound of his voice startled him with its earnestness.

"Certainly, if you wish it," he said. "It's too charming an invitation from too charming a person for me to refuse."

Apparently Miss Marshall was a little taken aback; there seemed a shade less cordiality in her tone as she replied, "Oh, if you would much rather not, you know—if it's inconvenient or anything—please don't let me put you out."

"Oh, but I'd love to come—really and truly I would."

With an even more ambiguous, "Oh, thanks; then we will expect you, good-by—" the 'phone was closed.

Poor Daggancourt was terribly cast down at the news and expostulated tremblingly, with tears in his eyes. He was so humble, so quaveringly restrained, that his reproaches were harder to bear than if they had been more outspoken. Mrs. Sattane and the others were merely surprised—very much surprised, indeed—and listened with the greediest of ears and the most evident incredulity to the tale of a forgotten promise to Mr. Doty. Hunter Hoyt, buzzing about tipsily, was very pleased to think they were going to keep their dear old boys after all, and made what to Matt was a very opportune diversion by falling off the porch.

In the confusion attending his rescue, and the subsequent examination of some highly-prized shrubs by Mrs. Sattane, and of a highly-prized leg by the journalist, Matt managed to slip away without a remark, and take the river road to the pines. An unreasoning elation possessed him; he was eager to be alone with himself and dream, for had not a lovely queen stooped to notice him, and thrown him a flower?

CHAPTER VII

CHRISTINE MARSHALL

NEVER was a Saturday night more slow of arrival, yet when at last Matt stood at the entrance of the church, and heard the babel of voices within, he was stricken with a sort of terror. He entered guiltily, and once inside had a fresh spasm of dismay to find he was apparently the only man there in evening dress. The place was crowded and hot and noisy and disconcerting; committeemen with rosettes grabbed his hand and welcomed him as "brother"; excited young ladies surrounded him, holding up objects for sale, and overwhelming him with saucy pleasantries; little girls, with immense bows in their hair, tried to drag him toward the booths, of which there was a row on either side of the church, forming a sort of street or promenade between.

There was the comic Irish policeman, embarrassing everybody (as well as himself) by arresting them, and a comic judge, in false whiskers, before whom culprits were brought. Mr. Price, in pink tights, was exhibiting Mr. Goldstein as a performing bear, who emitted ferocious growls in a Jewish accent; spoons clattered on emptying saucers; children, already

speechless with ice-cream, were forcing doughnuts, pies and sugared waffles into bursting little bread-baskets. Over all, here, there and everywhere, was Mr. Doty, feverishly cordial, perspiringly gay, gimleting his way through the crush to make sure that every one was having "a good time."

It was all very kindly and simple and good-natured and genuine, and had it not been for a devouring suspense, and a restlessness that kept Matt ever on the alert, he would have entered into the affair with his usual amiability. But at the moment it was maddening. He had to laugh and chatter; to eat things he didn't want to eat; to buy things he didn't want to buy; to be hilarious when arrested by the comic policeman—infliction after infliction to one whose heart was in a tumult, and whose eyes were ever on the watch.

But here-there-and-everywhere Mr. Doty was more to be trusted than Matt had thought; of a sudden he came bustling up like a rushing little tug, towing two statelier ships. Bewildering introductions ensued; Matt found himself shaking hands with an imposing gentleman with a white mustache; shaking hands with a young lady in blue foulard, whose dark, soft glance lingered curiously on his own. Matt hardly knew whether she was pretty or not—or at least very pretty. His first impression was more of graciousness, youth and breeding; of rather an impudent little mouth, parting continually on perfect teeth; of delicately penciled eyebrows, a

nose slightly aquiline, and an abundance of glossy hair, which under the lamplight appeared darker than it really was.

"I've met a considerable number of kings in my time," said the general genially, "but always glad to add another to the list, you know. It's rather a reproach to us, I'm afraid, that we let the papers discover you first."

"Oh, those papers!" exclaimed Matt. "But really, General, what is one to do? I might as well run after an express train as try to deny all that rubbish."

"Nobody is safe in this country," agreed the general with great good-humor. "You can go to bed at night an honored citizen, and wake up in the morning an alliterative outcast—Merciless Marshall Murders Maid, or something equally surprising and unpleasant."

"It's the smudgy pictures I hate most," put in Miss Marshall. "I've had mine stuck all round with little cupids shooting arrows into an unfortunate foreign nobleman."

"We've all been there," said the general. "When the up-to-date American stops a runaway or saves a drowning lady he invariably gives a false name and address and then scoots out of sight. The modern boy on the burning deck would never have admitted to the reporters that he was Casabianca. He'd have called himself Smith probably and insisted there wasn't any fire!"

The general, still laughing at his own sally, was greeted and diverted by a passing acquaintance, affording Matt the opportunity of asking Miss Marshall if she would not like to make the round of the booths with him. Her face showed her pleasure at the proposal, and in her answering look, so arch and eager, Matt seemed to read something that made him dizzy. She was more than pretty, she was exquisite, and the sudden realization of her beauty was not without a dart of pain. They moved about, talking—or rather trying to talk, for the noise and jostle caused constant interruptions—talking, and hoping for chairs, and eluding the general like a pair of truants, all the while looking into each other's eyes and laughing. But there were no chairs; there was not an empty spot in the whole church, except in the pulpit, and that was set inaccessibly in mid-air, like a wooden lily, on a long, twisted stem. Matt gazed at it, much as a castaway sailor might gaze at an airship—an unmanned airship, drifting high above his head. But as he gazed his resolution grew, and he announced it recklessly.

"But they'll all see us!" cried Miss Marshall aghast.

"Only the tops of our heads, and they won't recognize us," said Matt.

"And Mr. Doty will be scandalized—everybody will."

"Oh, nonsense," said Matt. "It's the dickens to stand up here, with people digging into you and pes-

tering you to buy beadwork pin-cushions when you'd give everything in the world for a cozy talk."

"A cozy talk *would* be nice, wouldn't it? Though it would take an elephant to get through all—"

"Come along, I'll be the elephant."

The pulpit was reached by a spiral stair—or rather could be reached by pressing apart a stout lady gabbling to another stout lady, sweeping through five gauzy little girls, and disturbing a mounting tier of sweethearts, two to a step. Had Matt not been in evening dress he would never have succeeded in dislodging these lovers, but his swallowtail was an awe-inspiring garb and bore with it a mysterious authority. Moreover, with quick presence of mind that convulsed his companion, Matt announced that he was going to give a recitation, which allayed resentment and filled every one with delighted anticipation. The blockade was broken, and Matt had the supreme satisfaction of leading Miss Marshall into the pulpit. He would have put her on the chair—there was a chair—but she preferred the hassock, insisting at the same time that he should sit on the floor. Here they cowered out of view, trying to restrain their laughter.

"Now tell me about those five times," said Matt.

"What five times?" inquired Miss Marshall, provokingly insincere, and with that pretty parting of her lips.

"Oh, you know—what you said over the 'phone."

"I'd rather hear about your *first* time."

"Now tell me about those five times"

"That's easy. I came here expecting to find you adorable—and you are."

"Men say things like that just as little boys shout 'Get a horse, get a horse!' when you're stuck in a motor."

"But you really and truly are, and—"

"And what?"

"In all seriousness, I'm almost sorry I came."

"Oh, dear! Why? Isn't the great, splendid, swaggering king happy in his little pulpit?"

It became Matt to look grave—became his strong features and well-cut mouth.

"I might like you too well," he said simply.

"Would that be so dreadful?"

"I'm afraid of life—afraid of deep emotions."

"But you've got over them before?"

"Not without scars."

"Isn't that what life is, Mr. Broughton?"

"Getting hurt and getting mended?"

"No—looking for that other half of one."

"Have you looked?"

Miss Marshall nodded with an air of great seriousness. "I found him, only he was the wrong half—somebody else's half, you know—anyway, not mine. You mustn't think me altogether *jeune fille*. I am nearly twenty-three, and have broken an engagement."

"I suppose it would be horribly presumptuous to ask if I have any of 'the other half' qualities?"

"Oh, you want to make sure of a doughnut be-

fore trading in your cooky. My other half could never be so cautious."

"But you do like me, don't you? You would scarcely have telephoned to me like that if you hadn't."

"That's true; it was perfectly crazy of me, and almost entitles you to think everything."

"Everything? What's everything?"

"That I meant more than I did."

"What exactly did you mean?"

"Oh, how you pin me down! It's so impossible to tell you. You never could understand."

"Why not? I'm not so conceited as that. I am quite capable of understanding that a woman might like me three cents' worth, but not a dollar."

"It's that very literalness that makes it so impossible. Men—oh, how can I express it—men see everything so clearly—can express everything in different kinds of symbols, and chart them in their mind, like a barometer record or immigration statistics. We are hazier—more, more unformulated—all instinct—with a tingle where you have a fact."

"That's awfully clever—go on."

"Is it clever?—you see, we're even clever in the same haphazard sort of way, and hardly know it when we are!—You came and I saw you, and didn't think anything much about it except that you stayed in my head. Stayed and stayed, you know—not right out in front, but in a corner, like a hat-box your maid has forgotten to take away. And

every time I saw you the hat-box grew bigger and more worrying, till finally—" She broke off with a smile, adding lightly: "Oh, well, there's your doughnut, and now, please, I want my cooky."

"It's a darling little doughnut," said Matt, "and instead of eating it, I'm going to put it away in silver paper and keep it just to look at. And as for cookies—all I know is that the sweetest voice in the world said: 'Come to the church social to-morrow night'—and I came to the church social to-morrow night, where I found the sweetest voice in the world belonged to the sweetest girl in the world, and then everything seemed to go round and round till the sweetest girl in the world, who is also the cleverest girl in the world, suddenly became the only girl in the world, and—and—"

"Yes, you'd better stop there," said Miss Marshall. "That isn't frankness, that's conventionality. A second later you'll be saying, 'Love me and the world is mine.' "

"Would that be so awfully silly?" asked Matt.

"Not only silly, but bromidian."

"Bromidian? What's bromidian?"

"Repeating commonplaces, like a parrot."

"Mayn't anybody say I like you without being called a parrot—or that bro-name?"

"In good society Mr. Anybody never says that to Miss Somebody after an acquaintance so very, very brief as ours."

"No short cuts allowed, is that the idea?"

"Yes."

"What's the most I could be permitted to say, then?—worrying? You said worrying, yourself."

"It isn't quite fair to steal my word."

"How clever one has to be—to like you. One mustn't say this; one mustn't say that; it's like a complicated game, and terribly beyond a poor sailor like myself. You must forgive me for being blundering and stupid. I hardly know anything about young white ladies."

Miss Marshall laughed outright at being thus described. "I never thought of myself as a young white lady," she said, much entertained. "It sounds as funny to me as though you called me a young pink lady, or a young blue lady. Oh, dear," she went on softly, "I don't want to be too hard on my poor sailor, who's awfully nice and winning, even if he is stupid, and doesn't know the right word.—Let's just admit that I like you and that you like me—and that perhaps in some queer way it was all inevitable."

This unexpected admission made Matt's heart leap; again there was that dart of pain, that sense of overwhelming and somehow elusive happiness. The fragrance of that enchanting young womanhood was in his brain; the rounded contours, the swell of the girlish bosom, even the small foot with its peep of stocking—all intoxicated him with the magic and ecstasy of sex. For a while he remained silent, as though under a spell he was loath to break. "I don't

believe I can laugh any more," he said at last, looking up strangely at his companion. "I don't believe I can even go on talking as we have done. I would like to go away as I did yesterday, and think, and think, and think."

He feared a light retort—a word that might shatter the whole fabric of his fancy. But their accord was too subtle for such a blasphemy.

"That's what I did, too," she returned, in a voice that was almost a whisper. "When great things happen, one wishes to be alone, doesn't one?"

"Tell me your name," he said, still in that wondering tone. "It's incredible, but I do not know it."

"Christine—though they call me Chris—always call me Chris."

"And mine's such a horrid one—Matthew—and it's always Matt, you know, which is even worse."

"I like it. Matt and Chris—it sounds old-fashioned, doesn't it, like one's Mayflower ancestors. And ye aforesaid Matthew was a young man of noble presence, and of signal worth and understanding, withal sober and upstanding in the fear of God, ye whilk of all ye Pilgrim maids he chose one Christine Marshall, avowing for her—"

"Go on—don't stop there."

But she did stop there, looking down at him with eyes like stars, all wonder and tenderness and shining girl-light, with just a quiver of the pretty mouth.

Alas for the lie that came back to roost, accompanied by a peremptory knocking on the pulpit pan-

els, and the apparition of a very impatient young man in a high collar.

"Say, brother, ain't you ever going to give us that there recitation?"

"It has been unavoidably postponed," said Matt brazenly, rising, as Miss Marshall did the same. He pleaded with her to remain a little longer, but she would not. It seemed that by this time the general would be as a roaring lion, and prudence dictated a return. They found him, not exactly roaring, but certainly fretful, not to say crusty, and his recognition of Matt was of the scantiest.

"For heaven's sake, let's get out of this place," he said, smothering an expletive. "You might have had some thought of the horses even if you hadn't for me. Come along."

"Oh, papa, wait; I've invited Mr. Broughton to have tea with us to-morrow—about four;" then she added to Matt hurriedly, "Please come, won't you?"

"Shall look forward to it," snapped the general, with the manner of a person temporarily blocked in a burning building. "Good night, good night!" And with that, and the pressure of a slender, gloved hand, Matt was left alone—more alone, so it seemed to him, than he had ever been before in his life.

CHAPTER VIII

HEART BREAK HILL

HE rose the next day a very different man from the night before. A pitiless consideration of his circumstances, begun at dawn, and carried to the bath hour, had shown him facts as they were—the dismalest facts imaginable, and as gray as the first peep of that gray morning. Who was he, to be calling on aristocratic young ladies and whispering things in pretty pink ears? He whose fortune amounted to less than four thousand five hundred dollars, and who had need to strive very energetically to keep his own somewhat large and red ears above the engulfing waters. His business was indubitably mules—not to linger in fools' paradises, waste money and time, and drift into the most heartbreaking of false positions.

He tried to put that sparkling face out of his mind; tried not to linger on those girlish admissions that made his pulses beat; called himself, oh, so many times, a fool—a crazy, silly fool—and vowed all sorts of tremendous things. He would excuse himself from that tea; would leave the next day for Kentucky; would get back to dry land and mules

and sanity. But he did not wish to appear rude; he would hate to have his action misconstrued; he would go at four, after all, and if the occasion presented itself would tell her the truth quite frankly —that he had hardly any money, no profession, and a long, uphill fight in front of him. Though how idiotic he was to take it all seriously—himself and her and the whole affair—as though it were any more than a passing flirtation. It was just the incurable way he had of exaggerating everything—of making mountains out of molehills. He laughed at himself a little forlornly. What an ass he was, to be sure! What an ass!

After breakfast he made it up handsomely with Daggancourt, expatiating on mules with much ardor and enthusiasm, and gradually recovering the mulatto's sorely shaken confidence. It seemed that Victor had not slept all night, so distressed had he been at Matt's indecision. He spoke of it quaveringly, like a father to a wayward son, his face yellower than ever, and puckered with chagrin. He said that no one, even with mules, could go very far without "concentration of purpose." He repeated the phrase several times, always with the same note of timid warning. Matt apologized, explained, and promised to "concentrate." Victor was perfectly right! Mules first, and not another sidestep off the track. He proved his sincerity by promising to leave for Kentucky on the morrow. They shook hands on it, then and there, in front of

Buggins; and any lurking grudge that Victor might still have felt disappeared in that hearty clasp. But there was still a weight on the mulatto's mind. He stammered out something about the San Francisco money—hoped that it was all right—hoped that it had come.

"Excuse my mentioning it," he said. "But you know, we'll be needing it pretty soon, and I'd rather not sell the garage till—"

"Oh, that's all right," returned Matt. "It ought to be coming along soon, and if it doesn't I'll telegraph. Don't you worry about that," he added reassuringly. "It's one of those splendid jewelry stores with diamond necklaces in the window, and is good for a hundred times the money."

But Victor's concern remained; he had kept better tally on the dates than Matt; it was exactly twenty-four days since the latter had written—a long while, surely. Victor asked for the receipt, and examined it closely. "That's all right as far as it goes," he said, handing it back with a relieved expression, "though they don't have to buy the ring if they don't want to, or change their minds."

"If people like Snood and Hargreaves offered fifty-five hundred dollars for the ring, it's pretty sure to be worth it," replied Matt. "Even if they backed out, we could sell it somewhere else."

"Yes, that's true," said Victor, recovering his cheerfulness, "and maybe for a better price, considering you took the first bid they made. Depend

upon it, you could have raised them a few hundred dollars."

They lingered a while longer, talking about the three hundred dollars commission Victor hoped to get on a second-hand car, and as to the advisability of taking sixteen hundred dollars cash for the garage, or a thousand down, and another thousand on a nine-months note. They also touched on the often-debated and never-solved question of a genuine, pedigreed Fison jackass. This dazzling animal was capable of absorbing three-quarters of their capital, and would be, if he lived, a four-legged gold mine. His value, dead, was precisely seventy-five cents. No wonder the partners were harassed, blew this way and that, one minute the imaginary possessors of a genuine, pedigreed Fison jackass, and another forswearing him as an unattainable luxury and the embodiment of carking care. Victor went back to work, leaving the perpetual problem still unsolved, while Matt, with nothing in his head but mules, walked up and down the porch, raising more.

Perhaps he kept closer to the veranda that morning than usual, for it was warm and sunny, and likely to tempt the presence of Mrs. Sattane with her rocking-chair, her darning, and her interminable tongue. For once Matt was eager for Mrs. Sattane, and when at length she appeared he was very agreeable and friendly, drawing up beside her, with his pipe, instead of dropping off the end rail, as he ordinarily would have done. After a few

false starts he got her on the subject of the Marshalls, and though as a narrator she was as uncertain as a rabbit, and apt to give conversational jumps in the most random directions, Matt always contrived to bring her back, and running again in the way he would have her go.

The general, when a young cavalry officer, hardly indeed more than a boy, had made a runaway match with a Miss Koenig, of Philadelphia, who was so rich that people used to call her Miss Kilmansegg. He had thereupon given up the army, and taken to law instead, and from law had graduated into politics and Congress. After seven or eight years his wife had died, leaving him with two little boys, who were now middle-aged men, one a traveler and writer of some reputation, and the other, an ironmaster on the lakes, with a railroad of his own and fleets of ships. The general had taken his bereavement terribly to heart, and for a while went all to pieces, until his friends made interest for him, and had him appointed minister to some far-away and insignificant post, more with the idea of benefiting him by the change of scene than launching him into what was to be a distinguished career. He rose rapidly; was constantly promoted, and was one of the first American ambassadors, when that grade was inaugurated by President McKinley.

In the meanwhile he had married again, losing his second wife many years later in a carriage accident. His daughter, Christine, had narrowly

escaped the same fate, and for several years had been a helpless invalid, nobody ever thinking she would be well again. But at last she recovered, and was as strong as most girls, or stronger, to judge from the daring way she rode and her much-talked-of flights on skis.

On the Spanish War breaking out, Marshall had thrown diplomacy to the winds, and returned to Connecticut to help organize the state's quota for the national defense, receiving his commission as a brigadier-general of volunteers, and earning much local renown by his energy and patriotism. It was not his fault that the enrolled citizens never saw a Spaniard, or burned anything more deadly than mosquito powder. The picnic stage was hardly past before the war was over and the general reappointed to his former post. Since then he had definitely retired, more on his daughter's account than his own, it was said, to let her see something of her own people, and marry in her own land, his regard for courts and court life being none of the best.

He kept up three establishments—one in Washington, another at Bar Harbor, and the third, his big, comfortable old colonial house at Fair Oaks, about four miles out of Manaswan—moving from one to another as the humor seized him. Fair Oaks was his favorite, as he had owned it ever since his first marriage, and had never closed it, partly from sentiment and partly from the political advan-

tage of preserving a roof-tree in his native state. He was a Connecticut man, and there was the proof of it for all to see.

It must not be supposed that Mrs. Sattane said all this as concisely as it is written. The reader is presented with the maple-sugar of the matter, in one nice, fat brick, and has been spared all the preliminary boiling and steaming and skimming and bubbling and frantic running to and fro with fresh buckets of the thinnest of thin juice—not to speak of extraneous efforts and excitements that had nothing to do with sugar at all.

Nor are Bridget's interruptions included; nor the staggering intrusion of Hunter Hoyt; nor the general fuss and cackling attending Miss Gibbs' departure with Buggins; nor the arrival of an entrancing stranger, ostensibly in search of board, who subsequently took on the horrid hue of a book agent, with Somebody's History of the World in nine subscription volumes; nor a tramp, who hung gloomily over the fence and speculated aloud whether a pore man might even ask for a glass of water without having the dorg set on him—and who departed with a pie, a turkey drumstick, a loaf of bread, and, also, as it seemed afterward, a coil of garden hose—though where he hid it, or how absorbed it, remained as impenetrable a mystery as that of the Man in the Iron Mask.

It was a very dragging afternoon for Matt; he was restless, could settle to nothing, was both stirred

and depressed at the prospect of his call at Fair Oaks. He had dressed with such care that he was afraid to sit down; or to leave the porch lest his immaculate shoes might suffer; and was horribly conscious of the crinkling nature of his fresh white waistcoat. No girl could have been in more of a tremor. Periodically he went up-stairs to look at himself in the glass—to make sure there was not a hair on the neck of his coat—to brush and brush, and worry again that his hands were so large and so sunburned.

He had ordered a buggy for half-past three, a buggy and a man to drive it, for he meant to take no chances of missing his road. It came too early, and caused him renewed agitation in consequence—a quarter of an hour too early, when, as a matter of fact, he would not dare to start before the half-hour—giving him a whole fifteen minutes, therefore, to be dawdled through, with more crinkling of white waistcoat, and more risk to shoes, and a whole new access of that suffocating feeling, which he supposed to be pleasure, but was in reality much nearer agony.

Punctually to the minute he took his seat in the buggy and was just starting, when of a sudden he was hailed from behind. The driver pulled up, and Matt turned to see an oldish man in a silk hat, still breathless from running, who had evidently been exerting himself to overtake them.

"Hold on there!" he exclaimed, "hold on—stop!"

and relaxing his pace, came up slowly on Matt's side, and steadied himself a moment with his hand on the wheel. He was an important-looking personage, with a crisp, gray, pointed beard and heavy-lidded, penetrating eyes. His subdued yet faultless costume suggested a judge or a banker, or some one of equal standing—certainly not one who was accustomed to run or shout upon the public highway, or to hold on to buggy wheels to recover his breath.

"I beg your pardon," he said, in a decisive, arresting sort of voice, "I am looking for a gentleman named Broughton—Mr. Matthew Broughton—and as you somewhat conform to his description, and were driving from the house to which I was directed—"

"I am Mr. Broughton," interrupted Matt, surprised, a trifle alarmed, and most of all impatient. "What do you want?" The memory of the entrancing book agent tinged his tone with a certain belligerency. Was this another manifestation of the History of the World in nine subscription volumes?

"I've come a long way, and on very hurried notice, to have an interview with you," explained the stranger, gazing at him fixedly, "a very important interview, indeed, and you will oblige me greatly by postponing this little excursion of yours, and affording me your undivided attention for half an hour. In private," he added, with a glance at Matt's companion; "I can not be more explicit here."

"I am sorry, but it'll have to wait," said Matt. "I haven't a minute to spare. Please let go my wheel."

"But it can't wait!" exclaimed the stranger with indignant animation. "You do not realize what you're saying, or the issue there is at stake. I simply must insist, Mr. Broughton—yes, sir, I must insist."

"So must I," returned Matt angrily. "Tell me what you want in two words, and I'll give you an answer in one—and let go my wheel."

Matt fully thought the stranger would take fire at this, but he did not. Instead, anxiety spread over his upturned face.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"A short drive—to pay a call."

"Then let me take his place," pleaded the stranger, indicating the driver. "We can talk on the way—and on the way back. For God's sake, young man, don't go on thwarting me like this! I can't tell you how pressing it all is, how peremptory and urgent. Only half an hour—if you knew what was at stake, you could not refuse half an hour."

Matt was thunderstruck; such importunity was startling; yet he had not a moment to spare if he were to be on time at Fair Oaks. Nothing should come between him and Fair Oaks; and the delay already incurred put him in a fever. "Go on," he cried to the driver, and with that the expostulating gentleman was deserted—in the middle of the road,

with his message still unsaid, and his arms waving madly after the retreating carriage.

Matt was very much thrilled and tantalized, but at last came to the conclusion that he had been mistaken for some one else. Nobody could want to see him on a matter so secret that it could not be divulged except in private. Though possibly—and here was an idea—he was again the victim of those newspaper lies, the "kanaka king" and all the rest of it. Yes, this was the explanation; the man was a Sun Worshipper, or some kindred lunatic, with one of those hare-brained projects that rained down with every mail. How foolish he had been not to think of that before—to have allowed himself the least curiosity about the man, whom he contemptuously put out of his mind and settled back to dream of Miss Marshall with mingled torment and joy.

They passed through a stone gateway of a massive and towering design that reared its head like a mausoleum in the lonely woods. The winding road led through more, and was so narrow that the trees met overhead and the air turned chill in the defile below. It was a very big place, the driver said—miles and miles of it, and he flicked his whip in the direction of unintelligible local landmarks. It hadn't been worth taxes till the wood-pulp business began, and now even the stumpage would bring ten dollars an acre. "A stroke of luck for the general, wasn't it, what with pulp getting dearer every day—though he just let it lie like it was, and did

nothing. Thousands and thousands of dollars in wood-pulp and stumpage, and as good as money in the bank."

Matt suffered under these reflections; it made him feel more of an intruder than ever, poorer and of less account. Who was he to be driving through such unnumbered acres of wood-pulp and daring to lift his eyes, however timidly, to its owner's daughter? It emphasized his presumption, and every tree became a new barrier, abhorrent to look upon. It was in a very crushed humor, indeed, that he approached the lawns and shrubberies, the tortuous brick walks, and at last the house itself—a stately old colonial structure, with that dignified frontage of classic white columns so dear to our forefathers, and so expressive of their lives and aspirations.

Matt descended, dismissed the conveyance with the thrifty intention of walking home, and turned to mount the wide, high steps. He was greeted at the top by Miss Marshall, who seemed to spring up from nowhere, smiling and radiant, and bewitching to look at in her boyish riding costume. Her father and she had just got back—and oh, so afraid that he might have been made to wait—papa having met a long-lost lovely friend in a teuf-teuf and a tiger coat, and wanting to remain the rest of the week to talk to her. But they must go right in, or papa would be at the muffins and disgracing himself. Papa was terribly elemental about muffins.

Amidst this laughing cordiality Matt found himself being guided through a lofty hallway, lined with books and engravings, to a large, low-ceilinged room, where the general, also in riding dress, was standing before a log fire, and refraining in the most exemplary manner from any premature onslaught on the tea-table. This in spite of the fact that it stood temptingly near by, gleaming with old silver, and set about with red roses.

The breath of out-of-doors was still on the general; like his daughter, he was glowing from his ride, and had a fresh, vigorous appearance. He welcomed Matt with a charming courtesy in which there was not a shade of condescension, and his shrewd, strong, ruddy face lit up delightfully as his daughter bantered him about the tiger-skin lady. Even at sixty-six the general had not outgrown his attractiveness, nor the desire —and ability—to please. Somehow, though they were worlds apart, Matt was reminded of John Mort and Mirovna—the same ease, the same grace, the same distinction animated father and daughter, lifting them above all other people he had ever known.

Yet what were his sensations as he sat beside Miss Marshall on the sofa, balancing a tea-cup on his knee, and stealing little sideways looks at her? The dismalest imaginable, it must be confessed. She was prettier than he had remembered her—maddeningly pretty, and every mark of her consid-

eration came as a fresh stab, as a fresh realization of the gulf between them.

He was constrained; he knew he was not appearing at his best; he seemed to feel her artifices to draw him out, to overcome his awkwardness, to display him to some advantage before her father. But those old, profound eyes were not to be deceived, and had the look of wondering at her trouble. An ex-ambassador could read a young man like a book —even while eating muffins and joking about tiger-skin ladies in teuf-teufs. It appeared that a teuf-teuf was an automobile. Matt's ignorance of the word seemed to stamp him as a boor. What a misfortune, he had never heard of it before! He made an anxious note of it for future occasions, and then it came over him with despair that there would be no future occasions. He would never see Christine Marshall again. Thus altogether daunted and depressed, how hard it was to affect liveliness, to talk about the Islands, to try to hide that grinding sense of failure.

He hoped afterward that he had not talked too much about the Islands. It was all he knew to talk about. Cannibals, fighting, pearl-diving, and the shuddering, bloody business of the bark *Moroa*—things that people usually liked to hear, especially from a survivor of the last. The general, with a big laugh, called him Captain Othello—a sally that induced Chris to repeat, with a whimsical acceptance that made Matt's heart beat: "That

it was strange, most passing strange; 'twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful"—causing him to flush and feel very self-conscious, indeed, though thrilled, too, as those fine eyes turned on him so kindly and with such smiling significance. How little she realized their havoc on a poor devil who, then and there, could have knelt down and kissed the hem of her skirt, with such reverence and adoration that it would have been an added rapture to include a pair of trim, small riding boots as well and the very bit of carpet on which they stood. These thoughts, however, were not good for sustained and conventional conversation. Such as it was, it languished terribly at times, and the general's mouth could be seen to purse under his mustache, as though concealing—yes—a yawn! Captain Othello grew bluer and bluer, and more abstracted and constrained, until finally an unmistakable yawn brought him to his feet.

The end had come; he was holding out his hand; he was saying good-by; all was over and for ever. No, not quite for ever! Learning that he had sent away his buggy, Miss Marshall offered to walk with him as far as the tennis courts. She volunteered this in spite of rather a sharp look from her father, and a request that had the quality of a command, not to stay out too long.

Side by side, Matt and she walked together, both silent till the house was left behind.

"What's the matter?" Miss Marshall asked at

last. "You've been so different to-day—so changed. I couldn't make it out, and, and—"

"And what?" inquired Matt somberly.

"It hurt me a little. I thought you might be glad —glad to come, you know."

"I was glad to come."

"Poor fellow—I suppose you have to say that."

"I knew I was dull and disappointing, and the more I tried the duller I got, and—that's it, if you want to know."

She moved closer to him, and announced, with a shade of relief in her voice, that he was a very foolish person. He hadn't been a bit dull, nor disappointing—the idea! But did not seem himself, that was all, and mopy. Dreadfully mopy.

"It's because I'm going away to-morrow," he said. "Because"—and he faltered at anything so outright—"because I'll never see you again."

There was a pause.

"You mustn't," she murmured at last. "I don't want you to go away."

"But I have to."

"Oh, you have to?" she repeated questioningly.

"To do things—to start in seriously." He could not say mules. Mules stuck in his throat.

"But how does that mean never seeing me again? That's what you said, wasn't it?"

"It's hard to explain; you wouldn't understand."

"No, I don't suppose I would," she assented. "I was foolish enough to think that you—that you—"

"That I loved you?"

"Oh, no, no, not that—that would be absurd—"

"But I do."

He walked along, grimly, stiffly, in a fury with everything. "That's why I was on such pins and needles up there," he broke out passionately. "I had no right there, and I knew it; every look at you drove it home—the utter hopelessness of it. I have to go away with the few thousands I have and try to do something—work—earn money. But if I succeeded beyond all my expectations you would be as inaccessible as ever—as unattainable. I am nothing—nobody—the dirt under your feet. You wonder why I was so dull, so stupid—I was grinding to pieces, if you want to know, yes, grinding to pieces, and almost hating you!"

"If I felt like that about anybody, I'd stay," she exclaimed breathlessly. "I wouldn't give anybody else a chance. I think if I really loved anybody I would kill them first."

Matt turned and caught her squarely by the shoulders, those slender, girlish shoulders, and held her out at arm's length in a vise. "You would, would you?" he cried. "Don't tempt me, or I will! I give you your choice. I told you I would go. It's for you to choose, the one way or the other. Choose, choose!"

But his revulsion was as swift as his act. He let her go, stricken at her pallor, her gasp of pain—appalled, and incoherently remorseful. He smoothed

her dress with his big hands; he was a brute, a crazy brute, he quavered convulsively; he saw her through a blur, trembling, swaying, obstinately averting her eyes, and giving them little dabs with her handkerchief. As she recovered he waited for his sentence, his doom. He had transgressed the last law, and might be thankful if she even spoke to him again. Perhaps she would turn away without a word, and that would be the end.

When she did speak it was not to annihilate him at all. It was all her own fault, she said, tremulously smiling. "That's what always happened when you goaded elemental people—great, big, rough, elemental people. They grabbed you in their great, big, rough, elemental way and shook the curl out of your hair, wanting you to choose. As though anybody could choose while being shaken like a rat! And what was she to choose, anyhow? Would he please to tell her, like an ordinary, grown-up, unelemental person?"

Matt was more abashed than if the heavens had opened with thunderbolts. He had expected thunderbolts, and in a sort of way had braced himself to receive them; but he had no armor against these teasing shafts. He colored to the ears, and was acutely embarrassed, wincing at every allusion to his outrageous conduct. She seemed to enjoy making him wince—found a wicked zest in it. Everything he said was gently ridiculed. That he should be in love with her was apparently the most ridiculous

thing of all. She referred to his word "choose," and tangled up all his blurting explanations.

"Men are all egoists," she said cruelly, "and the contempt you have for us is really disheartening. To you, we're all little ninnies, without the least will of our own—just laid out on the sideboard like prizes at a bridge party. It has never dawned on you that I have any courage, any individuality—now, has it?"

Matt vehemently protested that she had both—lots of both—till he was abruptly cut short.

"No, no," she said. "To you, I'm just a charming little drawing-room ornament, sparkling in the fire-light;—just a dear little noodle that you'd like to put in a crate and take home with you—and you're horribly miserable because you can't and somebody else may—noodle having no voice in the matter at all, only rather hoping that the crate will be padded with pink silk—that being the limit of her poor little noodle intelligence. The last thing to occur to you is that I'm a woman, with a head of my own and a heart of my own, able to take my place at a man's side, and work and fight with him."

She stopped, flushing and overcome. "That's what I meant when I said you mustn't go," she added piteously. "Can't you see?"

Matt was less backward than stunned. He must have misunderstood; he could not believe it. It was only when her hands went to her face and her head bowed in an extremity of shame that comprehension

really flashed on him. He pulled away her hands, incredulous still, yet mad with joy—pulled them away and kissed her on the lips, her burning, averted lips—again and again and again, insatiable of her young beauty, and inflamed by a resistance that was no resistance at all, but the panting, shaking and almost terrified surrender of a woman to the man she loved.

"I hold you to it," he whispered. "I hold you to every word you said. I love you, and you love me, and nothing on earth shall ever separate us!" Then, obeying her stifled entreaty, he released her, and the pair gazed at each other in the deepening dusk, awed, struck to silence, and somehow at one with the trees, the sky, and all nature of which they, too, were one, and at whose altar they vowed themselves to each other and received the benison of the stars.

Matt would have clasped her again in his arms, but she gently resisted. He was to go, she said. Had he not taken enough already? Was she not so spent that to take more would kill her? Besides, she wished to be alone—to nestle to her heart the sweetest moment of her life, without even that great big him to disturb her. He was such a disturber! He would kiss her again and she would lose all the others—those precious first ones that would always be the dearest. No, he was to go. Please, he was to go. Please, it was a favor.

He perceived that she was in earnest, and something told him, moreover, that she was with difficulty

holding back her tears—those tears which it would be a sacrilege for him to share. So, manfully, and with a quickening perception, he made no further demur, but turned and left her, looking back once to wave his hand, and to take one last look.

But she loved him. That was all his dizzy head could hold. She loved him. Christine Marshall loved him. She was willing to strip herself of everything to follow him the wide world over. Yes, men were egoists—blind, stupid egoists, measuring women's love by their own. No wonder the Bible said "passing the love of women." The old fellow who wrote that three thousand years ago could think of no better superlative. "Passing the love of women!" Up to yesterday that old fellow had known more than he did. Yesterday he hadn't known anything—he had acquiesced miserably in what he thought was the inevitable. He had sat there that afternoon like a death's head, till even the general, inured to boredom, had yawned; and all the while she had loved him—Chris had loved him! Nothing could matter now, nothing could hurt him. Chris loved him!

CHAPTER IX

MR. KAY INTRODUCES HIMSELF

HE had completely forgotten the frockcoat person, he of the silk hat, and subdued masterfulness, who had clung to his front wheel with agitated pertinacity hardly three hours before. Matt was reminded of his existence by finding him on Mrs. Sattane's front porch, wearily blocking the road to supper. By all rights the stranger should have been excessively annoyed, but on the contrary he was suavity itself, rising at Matt's approach, and greeting him with formidable politeness.

Might he take the liberty of repeating his request to see Mr. Broughton in private? Might he, without undue insistence, remind Mr. Broughton of the very serious issues at stake, and the need—the very great need—of expedition? The heavy-lidded eyes were full of insistence; the pointed grey beard waggled like a goat's—a tired but pertinacious goat, with yellow teeth and a cavernous way of talking, till you could see all the way down his throat. He brushed aside the invitation to supper, saying, in an injured tone, that he must beg Mr. Broughton's consideration. After three hours of waiting was he not entitled to an immediate interview—an immediate

interview in private? No, it need not be long. In some aspects it was a very simple affair—a proposal on the part of certain principals—an acceptance—er—it was to be hoped—on Mr. Broughton's.

Apologizing for having no better place to offer, Matt led the stranger up-stairs to his bedroom, where, after lighting the single gas-jet, he offered him a chair, and himself took a seat on the bed.

"Now, what's your name?" asked Matt, lighting his pipe and throwing out his long legs.

The stranger, somewhat stammeringly, replied that he might be called Mr. Kay. Though whether he meant K-a-y or merely the letter K was left obscure.

"Well, Mr. Kay," continued Matt, "let's get one thing understood right off. I am not a kanaka king, and I haven't any islands, or money, or subjects, or fleets, or pearling beds, or anything. If you have the least misconception of that kind about me, the sooner you get rid of it the better."

"You refer doubtless to those newspaper accounts?" inquired the stranger.

Matt nodded.

"Yes, all that rot," he said.

"I'm familiar with them," observed the stranger, drawing up close to the bed. "Perhaps I'm also more familiar with the actual facts than you will credit. Circumstances have forced me to acquaint myself with them—to separate the wheat from the chaff. From a vast deal of chaff," he added un-

bendingly. "Well, well, now to business." With that he produced from his pocket a small, flat object wrapped in tissue paper. Divesting it of its covering, he passed a little ivory miniature to Matt. "Do you happen to recognize that person?" he asked.

Matt took it with surprise, for it was rimmed with diamonds, and backed with gold like an unwieldy brooch—with a surprise that changed to consternation as he beheld the unmistakable face of John Mort. It was a face younger by twenty years than the John Mort he had known, smoother and more rounded, and with the hair altogether black; a flattering picture, much too pink and prettified and youthfully handsome for even the original at the age it represented him. But it was John Mort, just the same; he could have picked it out of a roomful of miniatures—a whole gallery; John Mort, staring up at him from a circlet of diamonds, with an imperious air that somehow had been caught while all the rest was falsified by the obsequious artist.

Chills ran down Matt's back; it was as though he were detected in a crime; he was thankful for the poor light that must have screened his expression of dismay. For all Mort's warnings were now upon him in a torrent—and his own promises, his own pledged word. Here was what John Mort had feared —"the wolves" he had called them—in a voice he had lowered even there, apprehensive still on that lost reef, in those lost and lonely seas. The heavy-lidded eyes took on a new and ominous significance,

as Matt felt their glance on him. What evil were they meditating? What was their sinister purpose in seeking him out to betray his friend?

He returned the miniature, speaking as he did so with his pipe in his mouth—a subterfuge he had found useful before, especially when under fire—real fire—bullets. It is the mouth that tells secrets, and that in other ways than words. A pipe is a help. It hides agitation, and suggests unconcern.

"Well, what about it?" said Matt through his teeth.

"I asked if you recognized him?"

"Seen this person before, do you mean? No, I don't know who he is. Why, do you expect me to?"

The stranger was not at all nonplussed. It was disconcerting how coolly he took the announcement. He carefully replaced the miniature in his pocket, remarking that it was "a pity."

"I've something here that may freshen your recollection," he went on, producing a wallet, and from the wallet a thick roll of notes. Pulling up his chair so close to the bed that his knees touched it, he began to spread greenbacks on the coverlet as though engaged in a singular game of patience. A row of six, another row of six, a third row of six, and Matt, amazed, perceived that they were in denominations of one thousand dollars each.

"My God!" he cried. "What are you—a mint?"

The stranger, with a gleam of yellow teeth, and the first smile he had permitted himself, completed

a fourth row from a packet that was yet far from exhausted. Then he stopped, and said: "No, not a mint. Merely a person who seeks a little information, and is very willing to pay for it."

Matt eyed the seried notes; $1,000, $1,000, $1,000 in a green and overwhelming profusion; $1,000, $1,000, $1,000 up and down, with more tightly clasped in those stubby fingers. If anything, the sight stimulated all the obstinacy in him, enhancing his loyalty and determination in proportion to the bribe. But it would not do to affect unconcern; it would be bad policy to convey the impression that he could talk if he would. Excited innocence was the part that he ought to play—eager, covetous, astounded innocence.

"Twenty-four thousand dollars!" he exclaimed. "Would you really give me that for recognizing a man? Just for looking at his picture, and saying: That's Walter Jones, or William Riley? Why, bless you, I'd do it for a quarter of that—for a single one!" He picked up one of the greenbacks as he spoke, and smoothed it out lovingly on his knee. "Even that would be enormous," he said. "People aren't paid for that kind of thing."

"They will be in this instance," returned Mr. Kay. "We are desirous of finding—er—Walter Jones, and are willing to go to considerable lengths for any information regarding him, and his present whereabouts. That money there, Mr. Broughton, is but the half of what I'm authorized to offer you.

Think it over a bit, Mr. Broughton. Fifty thousand dollars for five minutes of—sincerity." He shot the last word at Matt with a snap. Matt was an irritating obstacle to a wolf in a hurry, to an elderly, tired wolf who had already wasted so much of his time—valuable wolf-time—on Mrs. Sattane's front porch.

"My dear man," observed Matt, "why not make it fifty millions while you are about it? I haven't the faintest notion whom your picture represents—not the slightest, believe me. I wouldn't know him from Adam, if he came in this minute."

"Is that your last word?"

"It's all I know, if that's what you mean."

"Oh, come, come; what's the use of denying you could tell if you wanted to. I'm not a child to be hoodwinked. There isn't a visit of yours to Sydney or San Francisco that we haven't traced. You were no trader—you were in the employ of—well—that individual we are seeking. You have to admit it—and once admitted we have a basis for negotiations."

Matt puffed at his pipe, and finally remarked that it was all Greek to him.

"The ship was Tembinok's," he went on, "old Tembinok's, the king of Apemama, you know, and he sent me off in her originally to buy rifles at something like a white price. But I was honest with him, and made her pay—carrying coprah, shell and that—and so he kept me on till I lost her this winter."

Mr. Kay gathered up his notes and returned them to his wallet.

"Think it over," he said. "Fifty thousand dollars is a lot to lose. Perhaps it may occur to you that you're acting rather precipitately, for, after all, a man's first duty is to himself, and you scarcely seem to be in—er—very affluent circumstances. If you should care to place a small flag in your window—a tie, for that matter, or any bright bit of color—we shall accept it as a sign that you have—er—changed your mind. Don't forget that, will you? It is quite conceivable that the sum might be increased if we were assured of your active coöperation, but it would be superfluous to go into that at this stage. Just a little flag at your window, and within six hours I shall be promptly at your service."

Matt burst out laughing. "Is that your usual method of communication?" he asked. "But why not a skyrocket while you are about it, or a blue light, and masks of course—and a password. I'll say Walter, and you answer Jones, or perhaps a single mysterious word, like gurgle. Gurgle's rather good—how do you like gurgle?"

The other's face darkened at this derision. When he spoke it was with perceptible humiliation and embarrassment. "I'm only an agent," he murmured. "Such theatrics are none of my making, though in this affair they seem unavoidable. Laugh all you like, Mr. Broughton; a man who has thrown

away a fortune for a whim is entitled to, though some day when you're older and learn how hard a world this is, it may seem considerably less humorous. Good night," he continued, holding out his hand. "Permit me to apologize for my persistence, and to thank you for your good-nature under the infliction. You will let me hear from you, will you not? And remember that the amount might be materially increased. Good night, good night!"

Matt accompanied him down the stairs and to the front door, where, with a renewed grasp of the hand and another cordial farewell, the stranger walked briskly away. It almost looked as though an automobile had been awaiting him, for a second later there was a clash of gears, a flood of blinding light, and a magnificent limousine swept headlong into the night.

Matt turned indoors again, eager for his delayed supper, and in a state of extreme perplexity and exhilaration. It was not everybody who would have refused fifty thousand dollars. The fact that he had done so put him in a glow of self-esteem. Though why had it been offered?—good God, why? And who was John Mort, and what could they possibly want of him? How strange it all was, how insoluble! And strangest of all that he, Matt, the obscurest of mortals, should be caught up in anything that could conceivably "shake the world." That was what Mort had said—"it would shake the world."

Well, it shouldn't shake if *he* could help it; he was loyal through and through; the "wolves" were chasing the wrong sleigh if they thought they could get a bite out of him. He was wolf-proof; thousand-dollar-bill proof, and they might hang about till their legs dropped off before they would see the tiniest speck of that flag—only curtains instead, no-surrender white curtains, defiantly announcing that there was a man inside—not a Judas.

CHAPTER X

MR. KAY OFFERS MORE

THE next morning turned out a veritable Black Monday. Not only was it raining a sleety, dismal rain—Matt could have endured that—but he was assailed, besides, by a succession of disasters. First of all there was no letter from Snood and Hargreaves; somehow he had fully counted on getting it, and the firm's delay in writing began to take on an ominous aspect. With scarcely eighty dollars in his pocket, and part of that owing here and there, he felt uncomfortably pressed for money. Then there was Daggancourt, whom he had completely forgotten in the flow of larger events—Daggancourt, effusively expectant of that immediate departure for Kentucky. To make a man weep is a painful experience—and it was in this manner Daggancourt received the news of a second postponement. His grizzled head sank, and the tears ran through the gnarled and wrinkled hands he raised to hide them. In vain Matt explained and expostulated, promised and protested. The old mulatto was disillusioned; his shoulders heaved; he brokenly repelled all consolation.

"I'd set my foolish old heart on it," he sobbed.

"I believed you were in earnest. It's—it's a terrible blow."

"But it's only put off a little while," said Matt. "For heaven's sake, don't think I've given it up, Victor. In fact, it's more of a life and death thing to me now than ever before."

Daggancourt shook his head.

"I was willing to go my last dollar," he said. "I could have worked for you with both hands, and starved and stinted—not for the money in it, Marse' Broughton—but because you are you; because it is the colored man's instinct—his curse—to love and serve a master. I made a god of you, and put you on a pedestal, and all the reward I looked for was the humblest of places near you, and that little farm of ours in the mountains. And now I see it was all a dream—that you were fooling me. Yes, sir, and fooling yourself, and it was nothing but talk after all, and scrawling sheets of paper, like a child with a toy. Say no more, sir. I shall not trouble you again. I am like the Psalmist who put his trust in princes, and verily was he disappointed."

Matt was conscience-stricken; he had leaned on Victor; he had found comfort and a sense of safety in the old fellow's rugged affection. It was hard to see it go, and it appeared doubly valuable, now that it was lost. It was with a very bereft feeling, indeed, that he saw the mulatto strike out into the rain, and raise the gampiest of gamps above his alienated head.

Then another disaster! Goldstein, confound him, had developed mumps, and had planted himself for the day near the telephone with a copy of *Lucile*. With the whole house to choose from, there was Goldy at the telephone, swollenly ready for every word that he could catch. Matt, burning to reach Chris over the wire and arrange somehow to see her, or at least to hear her bubbling voice, saw his way blocked by that grinning obstacle. To share that precious talk with Goldstein was an impossibility. Even the mention of Chris' name would throw the creature into a paroxysm of curiosity. It was a great name in Manaswan; the very apex of everything exclusive and aristocratic; one might as well shoot off a pistol at Goldstein's ear. So there was nothing for it but to brave the sleety rain outside and seek the booth at the candy store. On the road thither Matt stopped at the Western Union to telegraph to Snood and Hargreaves. Their backwardness was becoming intolerable.

"Snood and Hargreaves, 314 Kearney Street, San Francisco:

"Please give immediate effect to my letter, and remit money for ring by express. Telegraph reply, saying when I may expect to receive it.

"MATTHEW BROUGHTON."

When this was accomplished, he encountered the concluding disaster of that whole disastrous morning. His request to speak to Miss Marshall was re-

ceived by a maid, who said that her mistress was ill, and could not come down. Nor could a message be carried to her because she was asleep. One might be left, however. Did the gentleman wish to leave one?

Matt, wretchedly perturbed, was almost at a loss how to answer. Ill—my God, ill! The freezing rain outside was no colder than the chill that struck against his heart. Urged to haste he could think of nothing else than that Miss Marshall was to be informed that he had rung her up. "Broughton, not Button—B-r-o-u-g-h-t-o-n—and please tell her I shall call this afternoon in the hope of seeing her, and perhaps take her for a drive if the weather clears and she is well enough." The maid's tone indicated how little she anticipated either contingency. Then she cut him off with: "I'll tell her you were asking for her, and will call at three. Good-by."

At three he was at Fair Oaks in a worse downpour than ever, only to find himself rebuffed. Half soaked, he stood on the threshold and was told that Miss Marshall could see no one, and that the doctor had given her some sleeping stuff. The general, too, had intrenched himself against callers. Again Matt was asked for a message. He cursed himself for not having written a note beforehand and brought it with him—that he had wasted his time like a fool, playing pinochle with Goldstein. Wet as he was he did not dare to ask to be admitted and given pen and ink. All that he could say, therefore, was that he was very sorry to hear that Miss Marshall was ill,

and would they please tell her so. He fumbled for his cards. By George, he could write something on a card, even if it were only "heartbroken." He repeated "heartbroken" to himself again as he dived into one pocket after another before those supercilious, patiently waiting eyes. But he had no cards. Oh, hell, he had forgotten his cards! He faltered, then descended the steps; climbed into his buggy, and drove off, sick with despair.

Splashing along the muddy road he wondered at himself for refusing that fifty thousand dollars. With the money they had offered him Chris, for was not this what it amounted to? With fifty thousand dollars in his pocket he might go up to that big house and take her bodily away; marry her; have her for his very own.

Ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have taken the money—would have jumped at it. Fifty thousand dollars! It might be years before he would be worth a quarter as much. And here he was throwing it out of the window like a quixotic fool. It was not that he was tempted, for all he longed and hungered for it. It was more that he marveled at his own inability to be tempted. It made him understand how little people ought to be praised for their good actions—it was a sort of ethical revelation. It was not in him to betray John Mort. It was simply that he was incapable of it. He almost wished that he was not. It was not principle nor religion, nor anything—but a fact. He himself was quite

helpless; volition lay altogether beyond him; it was something he could not do, that was all.

At home there was a telegram awaiting him. It lay on the sitting-room table in state, so to speak, like a corpse—surrounded by a death-watch consisting of Goldstein, Mrs. Sattane and Hunter Hoyt. A telegram was unheard of in that house. The death-watch had been holding it up to the window and trying to read through it. It was all out of concern for Matt, of course—to be helpful in his trouble, and perhaps break the bad news gently. The bad news, however, refused to divulge itself even against the gas-jet, so the death-watch could do nothing but palpitate and hope for the worst.

Matt tore it open, and indeed rewarded them by the change in his countenance. He was terribly upset; he could hardly believe his eyes; the words, in their blue typing, swam before him.

"Matthew Broughton, care Mrs. Sattane, Manaswan, Conn.:

"Experts pronounce ruby flawed and worth five hundred dollars only. Firm faces substantial loss on advance already made. If accrued interest be not promptly paid, shall dispose of ring at end of statutory period. Telegraph instructions.

"SNOOD AND HARGREAVES."

He crammed it in his pocket and stumbled upstairs; he could not encounter those prying looks, which at such a moment were intolerable. It was a

blow to make any man stagger; defenseless, his first instinct was to hide. An extreme emotion exposes one naked to the world, which gawks and chatters and points its excited fingers. Matt locked the door, and with desperation read the telegram again. Good God, all he had then was the money in his pocket! Here he was with only eighty dollars in his pocket-book—he who had counted so confidently—with every right to that confidence—on well over four thousand—four thousand, three hundred at the very least.

Were it not for Chris he would have been less unmanned. The sea is a hard master, but it will always feed and clothe a man who has made it his trade. He couldn't starve—it wasn't that. But it meant losing Chris, abandoning all thought and dreams of her as his wife. He saw himself in a dingy fo'castle, and heard the hoarse cry of "All hands on deck!" That's what it meant now—everything gone—and perhaps a couple of years before he could even contrive to reach Lotoalofa again.

How did he know that he wasn't being cheated? Those jewelers, for all their fine shop, might be taking advantage of his powerlessness to rob him. It was so easy to rob him. They had seen that, and were now taking advantage of him. There was no flaw in the ruby. Everything John Mort had was of the best, of the finest. "Experts pronounce ruby flawed!" The chap would have paid him fifty-five hundred dollars then and there for the ring. He was

an expert himself—that bald man. He hadn't dilly-dallied or anything, but had been eagerness itself to clench the bargain. It was inconceivable that he had been mistaken. He was a thief, that was what he was, a low, contemptible, damned thief, who had discovered how to get the ring for a thousand—the thousand originally advanced.

He raged up and down the room in impotent wrath. People knocked and spoke through the keyhole, but he disregarded them—Hoyt, Mrs. Sattane, and finally Daggancourt, and even Smith, the night train despatcher. The wonder was that the list did not include Miss Gibbs and Bridget, and Buggins, too, for the entire household seemed to be gathered outside his door, prying and speculating. One, alone, could have been of the least solace to him, and she was lying in that great, grim house, beyond those miles of dripping woods.

But she would know soon enough—too soon. A few days, and they would say good-by for the last time, for ever, unless a miracle happened. The general was the only person capable of figuring in a miracle. But Matt built no hopes there. It was impossible to associate "Bless you, my children," with that keen, proud face—rather a withering resentment, and a glance that would strike like a knife. The miracle would be how to get out alive—how to escape with the least shred of self-respect.

No, with four thousand dollars, with Daggancourt, and the aid of Chris' intrepid spirit it had been

within the bounds of reason. The rose could have been plucked—general or no general—and carried in triumph to that Kentucky farm. But eighty dollars was eighty—nothing. Better confront the fact once and for all, with whatever courage and resolution one possessed. Brace up to it, admit it without equivocation, and beat no more against the bars of the impossible.

By supper time he had somewhat recovered his composure, and though very pale, contrived in other respects to conceal the crushing nature of his misfortune. He announced gravely that he had received bad news, and begged that he might be excused from giving the particulars. This saved him from direct questioning, but indirectly the meal resolved itself into a sort of game of hide-and-seek. Mrs. Sattane ingeniously turned the conversation on departed mothers, and moaned over the empty chair and the awful sense of loss; Hunter Hoyt continued with fathers—shakily, and with pathetic reminiscences of his own; a favored sister, a beloved brother, passed successively in review, only to die in the flower of their age; Mr. Goldstein introduced a coffin containing a young bride in her wedding-dress—but none of these artless efforts served to tap the source of Matt's depression as he sat there in a brown study, oblivious of everything.

After supper he got his overcoat, and settled himself in a dry corner of the veranda. The rain had

stopped, or at least was in abeyance, and the bleak night accorded with his thoughts, and protected him, too, from the distasteful chatter of the others. Here he mused, cold but secure, with no companion save his wretchedness. Life was revealing itself to him in aspects he had never suspected. "Man is born to sorrow as the sparks fly upward," said the preacher —another of those disheartening old gentlemen who had known more three thousand years ago than Matt had yet acquired in the twentieth century.

But he seemed to be acquiring wisdom fast. Looking back he saw he had moved among the stricken and had not perceived it. He had a new perception of why so many men drank; of the passionate refuge so many women took in their children; understood, too, the origin of those unexpected kindnesses that had once surprised him. There was a brotherhood of suffering in the world; in time all joined it except the favored few. This idea of happiness was all a make-believe, a fiction; you either ran like a donkey for the never-reached carrot in front, or if you detected the cheat, you were speeded from behind by a brisk succession of pricks. Such was life, as analyzed on Mrs. Sattane's porch, by one who had previously given the subject scant consideration.

Matt's reflections were suddenly arrested by the stoppage of an automobile at the gate, and the descent of a vaguely familiar figure. It was an immense limousine, not unlike the one he had associated with Mr. Kay's departure the night before. In

fact, the vaguely familiar figure was Mr. Kay himself, advancing hurriedly up the board-walk.

"So it's you," said Matt, rising to greet him at the steps. Any interruption was welcome in the general tragedy of things.

Mr. Kay blinked recognition, and then shook hands in the friendliest manner.

"Brought the mint with you?" asked Matt.

"Why, certainly I have," exclaimed Mr. Kay with undisguised eagerness. "I am ready to raise our offer to a hundred thousand, and shall be most pleased to settle the matter at once on that basis."

"How can I tell they are not counterfeit notes?" objected Matt banteringly. "No offense, Mr. Kay, but it might be rather hard on me if they were."

Mr. Kay pondered with an appearance of suppressed irritation. "Yes, you're entitled to say that," he conceded. "In the same situation I should be as cautious myself. But you are acquainted with the local people," he went on. "I have reason to believe you have many acquaintances here. Jump into the car, Broughton, and I will take you to anybody you wish—any banker or merchant you may name. Nothing could be fairer than that! Is it a bargain? A hundred thousand dollars, and the notes confirmed by some one you trust? Come along!" With that he laid his hand urgently on Matt's arm, but the latter remained immovable.

"I gave you my decision last night," he said. "Or rather I told you I hadn't the information you

wanted. You surely can not have any better proof of it than this. What man in his senses would refuse a hundred thousand dollars? I know I wouldn't. I was only joking when I raised you. It was only to see how far you would go. Mr. Kay, you are trying to buy something I haven't got, and there it is in a nutshell."

"Then who was the violinist you referred to in that newspaper account? The man who played on the ship, and quelled the savages when they were ready to attack you? Answer me that, please. It is very important—it is the key to everything."

Matt started; he had completely forgotten that chance reference to John Mort; the indiscretion of it now took his breath away. What an ass he had been ever to let Hunter Hoyt extort it from his lips!

"Answer me that," continued the stranger, with a gleam of his yellow teeth, and clutching at Matt's arm again.

"Oh, the violinist?" returned Matt, pretending to laugh. "He was nothing to get excited about. In reality, he wasn't a violinist at all, but played the concertina, and he didn't quell anybody. That was all the newspaper men's work, like most of the interview. It was simply that we had a scare once down in New Britain, and kept him playing till we could get at our pistols."

"Then there was nothing in it?"

"Well, there had been a massacre in the next bay, and—"

"But no violinist? No one at all resembling the miniature I showed you?"

"No, no! He was a Dutchman named Van Tassel—and had been a waiter in a Sydney restaurant. He was a hot-tempered little fellow, and had hit somebody over the head with a bottle. That's how we came to take him—paid us twenty pounds to smuggle him out of his scrape."

"I see that you can't help us," said Mr. Kay after a pause. "It's disappointing to have to admit it—that we thought you knew more than you do. Well, you've been very obliging; let me thank you for that, Mr. Broughton, and for your patience and good-nature."

"Oh, don't mention it."

"I wish I could persuade you to go before my principals, and tell them what you've told me. They blame me for my failure—are not convinced, you know—think they could have got this information out of you—this information that isn't there. Perhaps I might make it worth your while to come—out of my own pocket, you know—out of my own pocket. Would you consider it?"

"Where do you want me to go?"

"Only to the railway station, to a private car we have side-tracked there. You could show them that we are on a wrong scent—support me in what I have already reported. I should be glad to pay fifty dollars. Surely that would be worth half an hour of your time? What do you say?"

Matt hung back. He was confused, undecided, and not unconscious of a vague apprehension. Yet the fifty dollars was terribly tempting. It would allow him to extend his stay in Manaswan; to put off his departure for a couple of weeks; to be near Chris—to see her, to talk to her, to linger in paradise before he would be cast out of it for ever. Nor would it be any disloyalty to John Mort, but merely a repetition of evasion and falsehood, possibly even helpful, now that he was better forewarned. As to their doing him any harm, that was preposterous. Threaten, perhaps? Well, let them threaten! One could stand a lot of threatening for fifty dollars. He would leave the precious fifty dollars at home so they couldn't get it away from him. That was about the worst they could do—take away his fifty dollars. People who threw about thousand-dollar bills, and traveled in limousines and private cars were not the kind to risk violence. Oh, he would be safe enough; he was sure of that; these shivers and qualms were childish.

"Yes, I'll go for fifty dollars," he said. "Only if you don't mind I'd rather have it in advance."

Mr. Kay hastened to count out two twenties and a ten—and then seemed to find it an infliction that Matt should suggest any further delay. It was only to run up-stairs and leave the money and his purse under the pillow, but Mr. Kay chafed and demurred, and Matt, on his return, found him waiting with ill-suppressed impatience.

"Come along," he cried, and gripping Matt's arm as though not to allow him to escape again, hurried down the board-walk to the automobile. A moment later they were both inside and the car swiftly moving.

CHAPTER XI

THE PRIVATE CAR

WHATEVER misgivings Matt may have had as to their real destination were set at rest by the clang of a locomotive bell and the noise of heavy freight cars being moved and shunted. There could be no question they were in the railway yards, and bumping over unmistakable railway tracks, and the flash of a trainman's lantern still further increased the sense of security. What was there to fear with such men all about them, busily watchful, and likely at any time to dart up from the unlikeliest places? Nor was there anything alarming in the sight of the side-tracked car.

Mr. Kay begged Matt to wait at the steps while he went inside to announce their arrival. It was a good ten minutes before he returned, and then, in a state of such discomposure that Matt knew not what to make of it. His movements were nervous and abrupt; his face, even in the dim light, seemed distorted; he was breathing heavily, with short, quick gasps that showed his yellow teeth. Rasping out something that meant to follow him, he turned again, apparently confident that Matt would obey. For a fraction of a second that was in doubt, but

the recollection of the fifty dollars quickened Matt's resolutions; he needed that fifty dollars and would earn it, come what might.

He found himself in a narrow passage, bordered on one hand by a row of state-rooms that ran half the length of the car. The door of every one was closed, and the passage itself ended in darkness. Not a sound broke the stillness, and had it not been for the singular circumstances of his coming and his assurance that there must be others somewhere present, he would have judged the car deserted and wholly abandoned to Mr. Kay and himself. Convinced of the contrary, however, these state-rooms affected him with a suggestion of secrecy and evil plotting; in imagination he saw crouching figures behind their doors; hushed and stealthy figures, mutely signaling from room to room, and ready to leap forth as soon as he was well within their power.

Mr. Kay paused at the last door, opened it, and beckoned Matt within. It was an ordinary Pullman state-room, and bore no sign of any recent occupancy. There was no break in the serried white towels overhead; the racks were empty, and the pegs supported nothing; but the fact that the blinds were drawn struck oddly on Matt's attention.

He seated himself and watched Mr. Kay drawing the baize curtain across the open doorway. That the latter did not shut the door, but was taking particular pains with the curtain, increased Matt's uneasiness. The action was significant and again

suggestive of stealth and mystery. Even after he had settled himself opposite Matt Mr. Kay had to jump up once more and again adjust the curtain, as though his previous efforts had left him dissatisfied. Then he reseated himself, cleared his throat, and leaning forward confidentially, laid his hand on Matt's knee.

"Now, tell us what you want," he said in a voice that shook a little. "Ask for the moon—anything—and we'll get it for you."

"In return for something I haven't got?" inquired Matt. "Can't you get it into your head once and for all that I don't know the man you're after?"

"Broughton, that isn't true."

"Oh, yes, it is."

"You positively refuse one hundred thousand dollars for this information?"

"I tell you once more I haven't got it."

"But I offered you a hundred thousand dollars and you refused it?"

"Yes."

A rustle of the green baize made Matt feel that the question was less for Mr. Kay's benefit than that of some hidden person. The sensation was disagreeable. He would have given a great deal at that moment to have had a loaded revolver in his pocket. Mr. Kay's ill-concealed agitation and his almost terrified glances at the curtain were disconcerting, to say the least of it.

"Would it help at all," continued the latter, "or

give us a possible basis for agreement, if I could prove to you that you *do* know the gentleman we are seeking?"

"But you couldn't!" cried Matt.

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Kay, producing something from his pocket.

"Look at this, for instance."

Matt, in utter astonishment gazed at the ring lying in Mr. Kay's palm. With a cry, he picked it up and examined it. It was John Mort's ring—the ring those rascally jewelers had filched from him.

"What do you say to that?" asked Mr. Kay, gently but firmly regaining possession of the ring and slipping it over his little finger.

"Nothing," exclaimed Matt furiously.

"Who gave it to you?"

"I shall not tell you."

"Will you still persist in denying all knowledge of this man?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"That's my affair."

Matt had risen. He was in a white heat at the way he had been victimized; at his own helplessness; at the deliberate villainy of the whole proceeding. Had these people robbed him of his ring for no other reason than to make him penniless and to place him, as they thought—at their mercy? God only knew how they had got the ring from Snood and Hargreaves, but there it was, glittering

on that smooth scoundrel's finger, and as like as not an intentional provocation to a violence they would craftily turn to account. But they would learn their mistake; learn that all the rings or blood-money in the world could not swerve him an inch.

"I've finished with you," he said hoarsely. "Good-by."

He turned toward the doorway, no longer afraid, but in the humor to fling back the curtain and stride right through the eavesdroppers. If they blocked him, so much the worse for them. He was a powerful man; he could hit like a sledge-hammer when his blood was up; he welcomed the chance to land some smashers on those unseen faces and drive them before him like sheep. But he had scarcely moved, before Mr. Kay, with incredible agility, had leapt in front of him, slamming the door shut and locking it, confronting him as he did so with a stare of abject terror. There he stood, with his back to the door, shaking in every limb, and holding out his hands before him as though to ward off Matt's blows.

"Don't, don't!" he screamed out incoherently. "They're crazy! They haven't any sense! I won't be a party to it—it's criminal and I won't be a party to it! I won't be a party to anything criminal!"

"Let me out!" cried Matt with a suffocating sense of being trapped, and struggling for the door-knob. "Get out of my way or I'll strangle you!"

"No, no!" expostulated Mr. Kay, resisting him

like a maniac and sobbing while he spoke. "You don't understand. They're determined to get the secret out of you. They're putting themselves within the criminal law, and I'll be no party to it. Good God, Broughton, I'm trying to save you—to —save myself! Once open this door and they'll tear you to pieces!"

He was interrupted by a loud murmur outside, and the door shook under a heavy impact; shook and shook, threatening at every instant to burst in. Mr. Kay collapsed on a seat.

"It was none of my doing," he moaned. "You'll bear witness to that, Broughton—you'll bear witness to that when they've got us all in the dock. The fools!" he raged, in a sudden outburst. "The damned, crazy fools!"

There was no escape except through the window, and that was double—two panes of almost the thickness of plate-glass. Matt threw up one without difficulty, but the other stuck. He fumbled frantically at the catches, as he endeavored to lift it, while the door shivered now under the deadlier blows of an ax. But, thank God, the cramped passageway gave them no room for a swing. They were striking at an angle, as the lip of the blade once showed as it drove through and remained imbedded for an instant.

Oh, that window! Matt dug his fingers into the catches and drove like Samson, his desperation heightened by the splintering of the woodwork and

the thud, thud, thud of the ax. But the window was immovable; he could get no real purchase on it; he skinned his fingers and strained his back to breaking—and still it defied him. He must burst it then; that was the only way—burst it. But with what? Not his elbow. It was too thick for his elbow, though he tried with all his might, ramming it against steel. He looked about wildly, and could see nothing to help him; nothing but a trifling little brush with no handle to speak of. But there was Mr. Kay, crying out inarticulately and handing him something! What if it wasn't Mr. Kay's shoe—a patent-leather shoe with buttons, still warm from the foot. He seized it with avidity, this help from a quarter so unexpected—seized it with exultation.

Taking it by the toe, he crashed the heel through the window. Hammer, hammer, hammer, with the glass shattering and the jagged, vicious edges disappearing beneath a rain of blows—disappearing till he could trust his hands on the frame and wriggle out. He went legs first, crawlingly, scraping his wrists and hands on the thin knife of undislodged glass, waistcoat and shirt half pulled to his neck—but out, no matter how, till, hanging his full length, he let himself drop to the track alongside the car.

He heard shouts above as though the broken window had filled with emerging heads; he saw the chauffeur jump from the automobile and slink to the ground; there was a vision of the porter with out-

stretched arms, rushing to intercept him, and a guttural voice from somewhere cried out with a sort of wail: "Don't shoot!"

If anything more were needed to hasten Matt's feet it was this thrilling command. He flew. The lights of the distant station wavered before him. He dodged under freight cars and past the shadow of their murderous wheels; stumbled and fell over the rails and frogs; ran, till the stitch in his side was insupportable and his heart was ready to burst —ran, trotted, limped, till, thank God, there were people all about him, and lights and animation and security.

It was the hour of the New York express, with passengers waiting, and three hotel omnibuses drawn up for their evening quota. Matt threw himself on a bench between two of his unconscious preservers, panting and grateful, while they looked at him askance, wondering at his disordered appearance.

There he sat, slowly recovering himself and meditating what he ought to do. His first idea was to invoke the police; to enter a formal complaint and return to the car with a posse of constables. But as he thought it over the wisdom of this course grew less apparent; his story was not likely to be believed; indeed, his cunning foes might turn the tables on him and invent a complaint of their own, with him as the culprit. It might resolve itself into his word against theirs—the word of people in a

private car against that of a lunatic, prating of an offer of a hundred thousand dollars and of a stolen ruby ring worth a fortune. Thus analyzed, his case was ridiculous—a fantasy.

On the contrary, how easy it would be to accuse him of having forced his way into the car and made a disturbance—a crack-brained creature, probably drunk, who broke a window and had to be forcibly ejected. So reasonable did this become that Matt hesitated to remain longer on his bench. His clothes were torn; his hands were scratched and bleeding; he was reminded that he had no hat. He had better get home as fast as he could, and out of harm's way. It was notoriously an unjust world, and it was well not to tempt the lightning. So he hastened home in some trepidation, and only felt really safe when he had snuggled into bed.

The next day there was a note from Chris, brought by a messenger:

"You Dear You:

"It was so foolish of me to be ill, and spoil everything, though I got so cross at your being turned away that I improved instantly and ate a whole plate of calf's-foot jelly. This is to ask you to come and share some more with me on a sofa and call it an invitation to lunch. Papa is going to New York on business, and we can be all by ourselves, and I'm awfully glad and excited, though I suppose I oughtn't to tell you so—or ask you at all, for that matter. But come anyway, even if the heavens fall and you should get your beautiful, wavy hair all

covered with plaster. Twelve-thirty, please, and don't think I've changed, because I haven't, and all last night I was thinking and ——! I am awfully, deliriously happy, and somehow it is your fault, and I just lie back and shut my eyes—and if you are a minute late I shall *hate* you.

"CHRIS."

It would be impossible to describe the heart-rending effect of this letter on Matt. When his debts were paid he would have exactly one hundred and twelve dollars left in the whole world. True, many a man had succeeded with as little—with less—but that took time—years—and Matt had no years to spare. The only thing he could look to, the only thing that offered him a living—was the sea. He was as ignorant of civilization and its myriad chances as a child; he exaggerated the special ability needed, the special training; was unaware of what could be accomplished by sheer ability, character and courage. To him there was nothing but the sea and the hardest wages earned under the sun. He was sick with despair; he cried over that letter in the seclusion of his room; it was terrible to resign himself to the inevitable and give up Chris.

He went out to search for the private car, impelled by a forlorn hope of regaining his ring. Somehow, perhaps, this might happen; seen in the retrospect, Mr. Kay appeared to be his friend; at any rate, Kay had defended him and held the

door against his enemies. Mr. Kay might be terrified or persuaded into returning the ring. Matt was in that desperate state of mind when a man is fearless. He stopped at a pawnbroker's and bought a cheap revolver for three dollars; stopped at a hardware store and bought ten .38 cartridges for twenty-five cents; loitered under a tree and surreptitiously shoved six of them into the chamber and then went on with his right-hand pocket bulging.

He was ready for anything—was cool and determined. But there was no private car to be found. He searched the entire yard, and questioned every one, but the private car had vanished. It might never have existed at all for the answers he got. Railway discipline is very strict; chattering to strangers is discouraged; the pertinacious inquirer may be some spying agent of the Interstate Commerce Commission—with subsequent dismissal in the division superintendent's office. Nobody knew anything about a private car—nothing.

Matt idled about till it was time to start for Fair Oaks; idled, and smoked pipe after pipe, and wished he had never bought that confounded revolver which weighed down his pocket like a brick. Looking back on those agitating times, it seemed as though he were always waiting, always hanging on an everlasting clock and waiting. It was worse than boredom, because it gave him an unlimited opportunity to think; and all he had to think about was his hun-

dred and twelve dollars and his lost ring and the desolating hopelessness of everything.

He walked all the way to save the hire of a carriage, and waited again at the entrance to the grounds to time his arrival exactly for half-past twelve. She had said she would *hate* him if he arrived a minute late, so, watch in hand, he dilly-dallied until he could make his appearance with the precision of a Monte Cristo.

"Miss Marshall?"

"Oh, yes, sir! This way, please."

CHAPTER XII

THE KEY TO PARADISE

CHRIS was half reclining on a sofa, propped about with pillows, and in a Chinese wrap of magnificent old brocade, all gold, and twisted, embroidered dragons. Her delicate beauty was unimpaired by any trace of illness, though enhanced by the unusual brilliancy of her eyes, and a flush, too hectic for health, that mantled the fine oval of her face.

Matt ran to her, taking her hands and kissing them, and then sank on his knees beside her. His cares, his wretchedness, the misery of his renunciation—all were gone as the soft bare arms closed round his neck and drew down his head. Somehow, mysteriously, he knew not how, the load was lifted from his heart. It seemed that he had been mistaken; it seemed that he had been torturing himself for nothing; in that ineffable tenderness he suddenly felt himself secure, protected and consoled, like a frightened child caught close to its mother's breast.

She raised his face and scrutinized him with a pretty air of ownership and a gravity that dimpled at the corners of her mouth.

"A tired boy!" she said, speculatingly. "A wondering, worried, scared boy! A boy who has been thinking too much and eating too little—and, oh, dear, what a scratched boy!"

"I got that climbing out of a Pullman window last night," explained Matt, showing his wrists. "I had to break it with a shoe that an old gentleman kindly lent me, and got out in a hurry."

Chris' eyes opened very wide.

"What a funny, strange, impetuous boy!" she exclaimed. "Wasn't there any door?"

"There were people banging that in, yowling for my destruction," continued Matt tantalizingly. "I don't know what they wanted, I'm sure, but they were going at it in the liveliest way with an ax, and I chose the window rather than wait and find out."

"That was a prudent boy—but—but—where on earth did all this happen?"

"In a private car, side-tracked near the railway station."

"But how did you happen to go there?"

"That old gentleman took me there—the one who lent me his shoe. Paid me fifty dollars for going, and rode me there in an automobile."

"But why?"

"I'm telling it all the wrong end foremost," went on Matt. "It's an extraordinary story—Chris, it's astounding. I can't make head nor tail of it. I was actually offered a hundred thousand dollars—think of it, Chris—positively a hundred thousand dollars

right there in greenbacks to betray a man I knew. Had it forced on me—almost stuffed in my pocket."

Her surprise, disbelief even, caused him to draw forth the revolver in witness.

"It's not a joke, Chris," he said. "I bought that this morning, and may be mighty glad I did so."

The momentary flash of steel was thrilling in that quiet room and amid such peaceful surroundings. Chris uttered a little cry, breathing fast, and gazing at him in amazement.

"You frighten me," she gasped out. "Matt, I'm frightened. What does it all mean? Tell me!"

"The trouble is I don't know myself," he returned, as a tide of depressing recollections swept over him. "I am somehow a blind cog in other people's business, and the thing that hits me hardest is that they have ruined me. I've lost everything, Chris, everything I counted on to make a start somewhere. I had four thousand dollars, as safe as though it was in the bank, and it's gone, stolen—God knows how, but they have got it—robbed me, Chris, robbed me."

His voice was shaking; the realization of his loss was unnerving him; his shoulders heaved. "I've been in hell, Chris," he continued huskily. "I don't know which way to turn; four thousand dollars isn't much, of course—but it meant you; I—I hoped it meant you, after what you had said; believed it did, anyway—counted on it. Yes, you and I together, no matter how poor, but with some sort of a home

of our own. And now it's gone, and I haven't anything, and it means good-by, Chris—it means good-by."

He bowed his head in shame, refusing to be comforted, while she whispered and whispered that she loved him; that it would never be good-by, never, Matt, never; that as long as they had each other nothing could hurt them; that he was a poor, precious, foolish, silly, devoted boy-person without any sense at all, who thought he could walk away from love and leave it behind—like an umbrella, just because he hadn't four thousand dollars! As though it made the least difference what he had, her lover-boy, her darling, for he was strong and splendid and brave and big, and if that wasn't being rich, what was? And he had her, hadn't he? And he wasn't to think she was always a helpless, draggy thing, lying on a sofa in a dragon coat, eating calf's-foot jelly. No, indeed, she wasn't—but able to go out and fight, too, and jump out of a Pullman window, if need be, as well as he could, and probably better, judging by his poor, cut wrists—and work, yes—work her hands off for the man she loved—and he was that, wasn't he? He knew he was that.

After a while Matt was persuaded to get up and have his rumpled hair smoothed and his tie straightened, and was made to sit on a chair quite far away, lest Watkins should pop in and be shocked. All of which Matt did bewilderingly, but with his eyes

shining and a strange, welling feeling at his heart and something so lumpy in his throat that he had to hold himself very still, and dared hardly utter a word.

Then Watkins did come—not poppingly and shocked, but rung for, and composed, with a large tray and all the materials for spreading a small table with luncheon. As this proceeded noiselessly and deftly, Chris carried on a desultory conversation with her visitor that must have shocked even Watkins, at the latter's dullness. Matt contributed hardly more than yes or no to that bubbling monologue which screened his agitation; and was more than thankful when the deft and noiseless Watkins finally withdrew.

It seemed that it wasn't to be a real lunch at all, but what Chris called a dolly lunch; and a dolly lunch meant that Matt was to squeeze down on a stool beside the sofa, with a tiny table in front of him not much higher than the stool itself and with most of the dishes on the floor. A gay, unusual, little lunch, such as Chris used to have with her favorite doll, only now she was grown up and preferred a beautiful, big, handsome lover-boy; and the beautiful, big, handsome lover-boy sat there in a sort of maze, and wondered how he could ever have been miserable or sad or anything, till he scarcely knew the difference between lamb chops and lobster salad, or whether it was Rhine wine or fairy sunshine that sparkled in his glass. Sat there in an

ecstasy that brimmed again and again to his eyes, humbling him and ennobling him both at once, and giving a new meaning to a word he had so often said and never understood before.

Then the great secret trembled on his tongue and it seemed impossible to withhold it any longer, for it had become essential for her to know it. That it was safe in her keeping was a sacrilege to question; she was as true as himself and had a right to his confidence; it could be no reproach to him, no real breach of his word that she should now learn the truth.

Accordingly he began to tell of Lotoalofa; of John Mort and Mirovna, and of his long, lonely voyages at the behest of this strange pair, who in that waste of sea and reefs had founded a mimic kingdom and hidden themselves beyond the ken of men. He told with pride of their reliance on him, of their steadfast trust and friendship; of the silence he had been pledged to, and which he had hitherto kept so loyally.

How vividly it all returned to him as he went on—those far-off scenes, those faces endeared to him by a thousand recollections—that mystery which he had touched and shared and yet had never penetrated! He recalled the money of which there was no end nor stint; the anxious secrecy enjoined upon him; the stealth with which the time-expired natives were returned to their homes, often in boats that were prodigally given them,

and lowered over the ship's side far out at sea. Never did they take more from the same place or see the same island twice; the new men came from new islands, and often from groups as remote as the Tubuais or the Louisades. Once he had had a weary beat of a thousand miles to get rid of a boy whose only fault was a knowledge of English, which John Mort deemed he spoke too well. "Savages, Captain," he would say. "Bring me savages with filed teeth and heathen souls; we haven't any room on Lotoalofa for Bible Christians."

Then Matt came to the capsizing of the *North Star,* and the horrible, drowning scramble to extricate himself, and perch, with the crew, on her slimy copper. Spoke of it calmly, for all its nightmarish details, and with a mingled earnestness and laughter and a kind of frightened zest that made it so piercingly real to the young lady on the sofa that she trembled with suspense, and could have swooned as the *Hall* broke out the Stars and Stripes and . . . It took a cup of black coffee to restore her, which she held in one hand, while she clung tightly to the poor castaway with the other, lest somehow he should slip down and be engulfed in that awful—carpet. The poor castaway, too, was revived with black coffee, and none of the passengers of the *Mariposa* could have been kinder to him than this young lady, or more sympathetically solicitous.

In this comforting manner she accompanied him

to San Francisco and into the store of those rascally Snood and Hargreaves, an unseen witness of their duplicity. From thence there was a three-kiss jump to Manaswan, where she was made acquainted with Hunter Hoyt and Moaning Mary and Daggancourt and Buggins (quite a disproportionate amount of Buggins), and finally with Mr. Kay and his astonishing thousand-dollar notes and still more astonishing insistence to get rid of them.

"That's the whole story," said Matt in conclusion. "If you can make head or tail of it—go ahead."

"Of course, he has run away," Chris replied with intense interest. "And they want him back a whole hundred thousand dollars' worth."

"Agreed."

"A defaulting banker, perhaps?"

"Knows too little of money—I could have robbed him of thousands."

"A South American president, ousted by a revolution?"

"He can not speak Spanish— go on."

"Perhaps this lovely Mirovna isn't his wife?"

"I've never thought she was, but—"

"The husband is enormously rich, and is trying to follow them?"

"That isn't likely. Besides, he said it would shake the world. Those were his own words."

"How could anybody being found—any man—shake the world?"

"That's the puzzle of it."

"You are not positive of his nationality?"

"Well, I think he's a German. He speaks German fluently—though French, too, for that matter, and Italian."

"But a German's a German—they are unmistakable."

"I'm pretty sure he's a German."

"And Mirovna?"

"Oh, less sure. I couldn't guess what she is, but possibly a Pole, or some eastern European. She has a profile like a Byzantine medal."

"I've known awfully German kind of Russians—stiff, autocratic, and yet delightful."

"Yes, he might be a Russian."

"Oh, there it is! Political refugee—state secrets—the myrmidons of the Czar! It's as plain as daylight, Matt; he's a Nihilist!"

"An awfully rich Nihilist, Chris? It hardly fits into one's ideas of him or Mirovna. What! A Nihilist with an inexhaustible supply of Bank of England notes?"

"You may have put your finger on it right there."

"There? What do you mean?"

"Those notes."

"Well, what of them?"

"How do you know he doesn't make them himself?"

"Not counterfeit them?"

"Yes, counterfeit ones—makes them while you are away—were away, I mean—in the schooner."

"Why, I should have been landed in jail so quick you couldn't have seen my coat-tails."

"Passing them?"

"Yes, passing them."

"They may be undistinguishable from the good ones?"

"No counterfeit is ever that, and besides, the Bank of England paper is a secret in itself."

"A secret your Mr. Mort has learned!—Think it over, Matt—weren't the notes all small ones?"

"Yes, by George, they were! The smallest denomination of all—five-pound notes, and a fearful nuisance it was, too, counting them out for anything like a big payment."

Chris clapped her hands excitedly.

"There's the explanation," she cried. "Your island was a little money mill, and the moment your back was turned your clever Mr. Mort put on his overalls and got to work!"

Matt was unconvinced; he would have staked his life on John Mort's honesty and honor; yet to meet this reflection on his friend he said: "It's incredible, Chris; the false notes, however skilfully imitated, were bound to return to the Bank of England, and be found out. No bank can be successfully victimized for six years. It would know its own notes, depend on it, and the first batch of forgeries would unloose a still larger batch of detectives."

"No, Matt, listen," Chris protested with immense vehemence. "Papa told me that the Bank of France

had such clever counterfeits foisted on it once that it was afraid to denounce them publicly or to refuse to receive them. They were so perfect, you know—so undetectable—that it was risking a panic to say that they were bad, for nobody in France would have felt safe, and there would have been a run on the banks everywhere for gold. Don't you see? The Bank of France was forced to honor them in its own protection, rather than scare the whole of France and bring business to a standstill."

Matt shook his head.

"I can knock all that to spillikins," he said. "You forget the miniature they showed me, and its setting of superb diamonds. How can you make that accord with your theory? Whoever it represented, it was certainly not a criminal, but a very aristocratic young man with a military collar. Besides—I can not tell you how, exactly—Kay didn't handle it like a rogues' gallery picture, but with a curious respect—a curious, indefinable *deference*."

"I give it up, then," Chris exclaimed with a baffled little air. "If you couldn't have found it out in six years, I suppose I needn't expect to in six minutes. But it just makes you burst not to know, doesn't it?"

"There's a worse problem still—what is to become of me?"

"Us, Matt," she corrected him jealously. "Poor little hundred-and-twelve-dollar *us*."

"I might as well shoot myself as stay on here;

there's nothing here, Chris, in this little backwater of a place. What shall it be—East or West—try for a deep-water ship or strike out boldly for Colorado or Wyoming or somewhere?"

"Go away?" she cried. "No, I can't let you go away—I can't, I can't; unless you don't care—unless it's all—" She broke off, looking at him poignantly, only to be crushed in his strong arms, overborne, blinded, panting, and deliciously helpless and ill-used. Of course he loved her! Loved her better than anything in the world; would crush her again for ever doubting it. No, she had to admit how cruel she had been, how wicked and unkind; had to, or he would hurt her more, obstinate little wretch that she was. But it seemed that she wasn't an obstinate little wretch at all, only terribly smothered and gaspingly eager to be forgiven, and anyhow, how was she to know when he sat there so cold and distant, and talked about going away—that he really and truly *did* love her—as though anybody who loved anybody would go away and leave somebody to break her heart.

Nor was she a clinging, useless, impractical young-lady-person without any sense or ideas—no, indeed, she wasn't! They were in a very serious predicament, and she meant to be mouse to the poor, tattered, scared, whiny lion, and rescue him somehow and earn his everlasting gratitude—keep him from bounding off into the tall grass, at any rate, for the Teddy hunters to shoot at him, and the snakes to

bite him, and the hoodlum hyenas to laugh their heads off at his leaving the faithfulest little mouse a lion ever was blessed with. So wouldn't he stop being silly, and snuggle close, and listen to some mouse-sense, and realize that this was her affair just as much as his, and that they were both in the same boat, or rather holding on tight to the bottom of it? To all of which Mr. Lion acceded meekly, with a dawning sense that there was a stronger nature than he had dreamed behind those dark eyes, and a courage and self-reliance that shamed him in the contrast.

"Unfortunately papa has to be left out," she continued. "General Mouse would have a fit at the least notion of my liking anybody who hadn't a town house and a country house and a yacht, and a cast-iron social position, studded with iron nails and spiked on top—and family heirlooms that his great-grandmother wore at Washington's inauguration. That's General Mouse's view, and he's likely to—squeak terribly at a poor little hundred-and-twelve-dollar lion! That's the bad part of it; the good is that when I'm twenty-six I come into my mother's money—three smug old New York houses, filled with dentists and doctors and sub-letting old ladies who have seen better times—somewhere between eight and nine thousand dollars a year. Isn't that nice, Mr. Lion? Isn't that splendid? Come, cheer up, and say it is worth waiting for! Yes, two years and ten months to wait, and then a fearful General

Mouse rumpus—and me. If you are still of the same mind, that is, and haven't gone off in another direction? Though—"

"Oh, Chris!"

"But this is a secret—I have to be sure you love me first."

"You know I do."

"But awfully, awfully well—better than anything—just *terribly.*"

"Yes."

"Don't smile about it—I said *terribly.*"

"I was thinking of all that money; it frightens me even while I'm glad—to be called a fortune-hunter, and heaven knows what—yet I didn't know; how was I to know?—It's staggering, Chris; I—I am trying to get used to it; why, we—we can get married."

"That's the secret—before then, perhaps!"

"Before then? Oh, Chris, Chris!"

"I don't care if it's only one room; I'm not afraid, Matt—only sorry about papa, and the way he is sure to take it.—You must stay here and get something to do, no matter what it is, and as soon as it is enough for two, I'll come, Matt, dear—I'll come, if it's only seventy-five dollars a month."

Matt gave an appalled glance about the room—at the pictures, the tapestries, the rich, dark, old furniture—at the elegance, luxury and beauty that everywhere surrounded him. "You couldn't," he exclaimed, overcome. "You don't understand what it

is to be poor. You see it staged and dressed up, and with a row of footlights, and roses climbing over the cardboard cottage; but it isn't like that at all, Chris; it's ugly and detestable, and I should be the most selfish brute alive to let you do such a thing."

"It needn't be ugly and detestable, Matt," she returned, with a tender, reproving seriousness. "The trouble is that poor people are usually poorer still in taste, and are horribly oil-clothy, and given to chromos of Swiss lakes and screaming green carpets. We won't be that kind of poor, and I promise you I'll surprise you how well I'll manage, and how pretty and cozy everything will be. Other people have done it and been happy—and we'll do it and be happier. No, it's settled, Mr. Lion, and if you fight about it any more I shall think it is because you really do not want me."

"Oh, Chris, it isn't that. God knows it isn't that. I—I—am a man, and I—"

"And you never can remember that I'm a woman," she interrupted with an unshrinking look. "It isn't very fair of you, is it? I am ten years more grown-up than you are, though I'm only twenty-three; and I am ready for life to begin—greedy for it—greedy for the hurts as well as for the other if it's with a man I could love. What would you do in my place, I ask you that? Suppose you were lying here in a dragon coat, and I was you—what would you say then, Matt?"

"Just what you've said, of course."

"And mean it?"

"With all my heart."

"And would you be afraid?"

"No, not a bit afraid."

"And wouldn't you rather risk everything than—than wait those three years—three long, lonely years?"

"Yes, I would, Chris—it would be just the question whether you loved me well enough, wouldn't it?"

"And I do."

"Chris?"

"Yes, dearest."

"It's settled then, isn't it?"

"That's for you to say."

"Me? I have said it."

She drew his head to her bosom. "The mouse was some help after all," she murmured with a happy little laugh. "Lion thought he was at the jumping-off place, but mousie caught his beautiful, frightened tail just in time—though it took an awful big mouse-pull to save him from going over—and now she is going to kiss him for being a stay-at-home work-lion, and ready to fight the whole world rather than let her go."

"It's going to be a hard business, Chris."

"I know it—but you mustn't get discouraged."

"Manaswan is such a confoundedly small place; but I know a good many people, and that's some-

thing. Anderson, the surveyor, might give me a job. I know something of that, you know—a great deal."

"Then there are the mills."

"All too skilled for me, I'm afraid, and what's worse—unionized."

"And the fire department, as you said. A sailor ought to make a good fire-laddie."

"That's a long shot—politics, you know. Pretty hopeless for an outsider to break in."

"The telephone company?"

"Yes, I'll try them. The electric branch was very thorough at the academy. I could take a dynamo to pieces once, and, what's more, put it together again and make it go."

"You see, you know lots more than you thought you did."

"I'll get books out of the Y. M. C. A. library and brush up a bit."

"Yes, do that, certainly."

"And there is Beckles' Bank. Beckles is such a funny old fellow, Chris—insatiable about the Islands, and specially about the girls. Has dreams of going out there, I fancy, and turning Grand Turk, the fat old scallawag. When I said the prettiest women in the Pacific came from Manihiki and Uahine, he carefully wrote down both names in a little book, with the most owlish expression you ever saw—right in the middle of stocks and bonds and mortgages."

"And Doty. Be sure and remember Mr. Doty,

Matt. He likes you awfully well; admires you, and looks up to you tremendously."

"Oh, I'll manage somehow—some way. And then seventy-five dollars a month, and you!"

"But try to save every penny of what you have and I'll begin saving my allowance. I don't want to live at your horrid Mrs. Sattane's. We must have a little home all of our own."

"Oh, Chris, when you say that it seems too good to be true! I simply can't believe it."

"And in three years we'll turn out a dentist and go live in New York, and perhaps sooner if papa comes round."

"It's dreadful what a schemer he'll think me, Chris. It almost makes me wish you didn't have all that money."

"Not when he knows you gave up a fortune rather than betray a friend. That isn't like a schemer, is it? It will all settle itself, and the three of us will live happily ever afterward—for he's awfully generous, too, Matt, and lovable and good and kind, and when he knows it's love—real love—he'll melt—and in a year or two he'll think he's arranged it all himself and be quite proud of it."

"Well, that's a long way off. The important thing now is to land a pay-envelope every Saturday night, isn't it?"

"Important? Oh, Matt, you just *must!*"

"And then you'll come—really come? Chris, I still can't believe it!"

"You will when you've got seventy-five dollars a month."

"I may not even reach that all at once. God knows, it may be hard to get forty."

"That will be a start, anyway, and if we do have to wait a little my allowance will be mounting up."

"We shan't wait if I can help it. I'll turn the old town upside down. Oh, Chris, with you to work for what couldn't I do!"

She rewarded him with a pressure of her hand.

"I will make it up to you," she said. "All I can give you is love, but you shall have more of it than any man ever had before. Remember that to-morrow, won't you, and think of our little home together —just yours and mine—if it's only two rooms."

Matt strode homeward in a state of indescribable joy, though with many a care running blackly through the bright woof of his hopes and raptures. He was pledged to a desperate plan, and one that would bring down on him a universal reproach; such a marriage would shake Manaswan to its foundations and unloose a torrent of gossip that would be harder to endure than poverty itself. Alternately he gloated over Chris' fortune—those "three smug old houses"—and then inconsistently wished them to the devil. Matt was a proud man, and the thought of being misrepresented and misjudged was more than galling. What a humiliating figure he would cut before her father when the inevitable day of reckon-

ing arrived! He would be seen as an adventurer preying on innocence and wealth. Yet ever before him, quickening his pulses and stirring him with delight, was Chris herself, with upraised lips and quivering body and misty, haunting eyes, all her young womanhood his to take by the divinest of divine rights. No wonder that his hands clenched; that he put by every doubt and scruple; that his determination was almost brutal in its intensity. He had passed beyond the stage where he could give her up, or even consider it.

The boarders, assembled at supper, found him at first very backward and moody, while he found them altogether unendurable. The mean dining-room, with its prattling occupants, was purgatory to a man in the throes of an elemental passion. There was a new boarder, a heavy, gray-haired, deferential man with a gold tooth, who was ceremoniously presented.

"Two good fellows ought to know each other," said Mr. Price, taking it on himself to make the introduction. "Mr. Broughton—Mr. Bates!" Matt politely expressed his gratification, and the two good fellows subsided into their respective seats. Mr. Bates, as it appeared later, was spying out the land for a shoe-factory site in the interests of the famous Walk Eezee Shoe Company, and had been very much impressed by the possibilities of Manaswan—yes, sir—very much impressed. At this Matt waked up and cultivated Mr. Bates as a potential dispenser of jobs; grew very animated and friendly; and was

more than pleased to learn that the Walk Eezee Company maintained the principle of the "open shop."

Here was certainly a chance for a non-union man —or a shadowy chance, anyhow—and Matt, with shoe-factory possibilities dancing in his head, absorbed himself in the conquest of Mr. Bates. After supper, over a pipe and a cigar, he continued the good work, even broaching the subject tentatively, and receiving encouragement. A new factory—a Walk Eezee factory—was a big enterprise, with plenty of opportunities for energetic young men. The trouble, indeed, was to find them—chaps with initiative and brains and stick-at-itiveness, who could "handle labor." Mr. Bates would be glad to put him "in the way of something"; wrote down his name in a large, greasy note-book; it mightn't be very much, but "enough to get his teeth in." Mr. Bates, with his own gold one very much in evidence, repeated that the great thing was to get your teeth in—the rest was easy and sure if you had the needful ability.

With a feeling that he already had a bull-doggish grip on the shoe business, Matt said good night and went up to his room, more than satisfied with his evening's work. As he lit a match, however, and touched it to the gas, he was confronted by a sight that drove all these reflections from his head. The mattress was tumbled and bare; the bureau-drawers were open; his clothes were strewn about everywhere in pell-mell confusion, and his cheap blue ulster lay slashed and destroyed, with every inch of its lining

torn away and littering the floor in melancholy ribbons.

The room had been searched in his absence, and the moment he recovered from his astonishment he knew by whom. *They* had been there, seeking a clue, a scrap of paper, anything that might put them on John Mort's track. Impelled by an unaccountable instinct he ran to the window and looked out. There below him under the street lamp were two men in close conversation. All at once they turned and gazed upward, revealing the faces of Mr. Bates and Mr. Kay; and then they passed on and were lost in the dim street.

CHAPTER XIII

DISCHARGED

THE next morning Matt was scarcely surprised to learn that Mr. Bates had departed. The representative of the Walk Eezee Shoe Company was no more—in any boarder sense—and all that remained of him was a two-dollar bill on his dresser, and Miss Gibbs' recollection of sundry creakings and tiptoeings in the middle of the night. Yes, he had vanished, that quiet, deferential, gray-haired person with the gold tooth, and with him also vanished Matt's job in the mythical shoe factory. The marveling boarders would have marveled more could they have known of Matt's devastated room; but this he kept to himself, and professed to be as much in the dark about Mr. Bates as any one else.

Afterward he sallied forth in his best clothes, and as spruce and well-groomed as he could make himself, to offer his services in what Mr. Price called, not without sarcasm, "the busy marts of trade." The first busy mart was Mr. Beckles' bank, a small brick structure with plate-glass windows and a red-headed cashier in a cage. Mr. Beckles received Matt effusively in an inner office, proffered a chair, and seemed readier than ever to talk about South

Sea maids, and the respective allurements of Manihiki and Uahine. The stout old dreamer was frankly and unpleasantly gross, and with many winks and nudges made Matt an unwilling confederate in his fantastic imaginings. They were to sail away together, in some undetermined manner, and at some undetermined date, and acquire a bevy of beauty that would stagger Mahomet; to live thenceforth like the patriarchs, waited on by the loveliest of naked nymphs, and fanned to sleep in the arms of their favorites. Hey, it would be great, wouldn't it? Hey, they'd do it, so help him Moses!

Matt, though far from squeamish, was disagreeably affected by all this. The atrocious hypocrisy of the old fellow jarred on him, for Mr. Beckles was a pillar of the church, and outwardly at least maintained a rigid respectability. It was hardly a compliment, moreover, that his own acquiescence should be taken for granted. He would have been wiser in his own interest had he pretended to a greater enthusiasm—lingered over and amplified these voluptuous fancies with his fuller knowledge—pictured the thing somewhat to Mr. Beckles' incomplete though glowing imagination, and given reality to those phantom brown odalisques. Instead, he switched off to the subject of his job with a suddenness that made the Great Turk crimson to the ears and assume an expression of detected guilt.

Matt left, not only without a job, but with the consciousness of an active ill-will behind him. He

was disquieted, too, to learn that, in spite of his reiterated denials, he was regarded as a rich man; and if not actually a kanaka king, had the reputation of owning vast and far-away estates in the South Pacific. Given a romantic past and some personal attractiveness, how easy it is, with a dollar thrown away here and there, to raise such picturesque illusions. The difficulty, indeed, is to avoid inspiring them. Mr. Beckles had been shocked—really shocked—and bitterly offended, too, at the truth. He would have parted easily with a thousand dollars to a swindler, but for the honest man, in dire need of work, he had nothing save a curt good day.

In Anderson's office Matt experienced a similar social tumble and a similar rejection. The engineer was at first incredulous, and then downright rude, for he, also, had a shattered illusion. As Matt left, flushed with anger, and in Anderson's eyes a convicted cheat, he perceived that he had a better chance with strangers than with those he deemed his friends. The telephone superintendent, to whom he applied next, had no acquaintance with him—and in consequence was quite civil. Courtesy was about all he had to offer, for the company was "full up" and had "men to burn." With this forceful colloquialism Matt was speeded on his way again, to try for a spot where the fires of commerce burned less brightly. That spot, however, was not the Western Union, nor the Buffalo Brewery, nor the Excelsior Planing Mill, nor

the People's Ice Works, to which in turn he made unavailing application.

Of course he could have gone to Daggancourt, but at that his pride drew the line. The old mulatto, considering himself deeply ill-used, had shrunk into his shell, and adopted a mien of frozen reproach. He had even ceased to greet Matt any longer, pretending to look the other way when they met, or assuming an abstracted expression in which there was not the slightest glint of recognition. In a very quiet, wooden-Indian manner, Matt had been "cut," and he was human enough and foolish enough to resent it, although he knew that with two words and an outstretched hand he could instantly have recovered the old fellow's friendship. The fact that he was beginning to need it made him all the more perverse. This was illogical and unkind, for Victor had ample reason to be wounded, while Matt had none.

He sought out Mr. Doty instead—little, flattered, eager Mr. Doty, who certainly must have concealed angels' wings under his threadbare coat. Mr. Doty was sympathetic; Mr. Doty understood; there was no social tumble on his study carpet, but a very practical consideration of Matt's unhappy circumstances.

It seemed that it was Mr. Doty's principal occupation to find jobs for the jobless; in Matt's case nothing could be simpler; the sea for the sailor, of course, and they would go right off to his good

friend, Captain Jim Bain, who owned half the coasting craft out of—

Oh, but Matt wished to stay in Manaswan! Oh, the old story—I see, I see—a young lady, and all the rest of it! Well, well, well! Let Mr. Doty think, let Mr. Doty think!

Half an hour afterward Matt was formally engaged as physical instructor to the Young Men's Christian Association at a salary of sixty dollars a month. It was a struggling institution, situated in what had lately been a disreputable hotel and dance place, and so near the mills that it perpetually shivered with the whir of machinery. Unlike its sisters elsewhere, the Manaswan Y. M. C. A. was poorly supported, either by the moneyed people of the town or the horde of illiterate foreigners whom it was intended to uplift; and it wore a dejected aspect, like that of a forlorn hope whose courage had oozed away at the sight of the enemy.

Mr. Cummins, the superintendent, a very low-voiced young man with eye-glasses, laid less stress on Matt's capabilities as a physical instructor than whether he would be prepared to "help out." That had been the trouble with the previous instructors—they wouldn't "help out." Diplomas and degrees were all right, but what Mr. Cummins really wanted was a young man that would "help out." "Cheerfully," added Mr. Cummins, with an air of extreme depression, as though burdening the camel with the

last straw. Would Matt help out cheerfully? Matt promptly replied that he would, and smiling broadly to prove it, inquired for a more precise definition of helping out.

This, it seemed, included washing the gymnasium windows, scrubbing the gymnasium floor, drying the bathing suits, cleansing the swimming tank, checking the towels, doing whatever painting or varnishing was required in the building, oiling and cleaning a dozen typewriter machines, and volunteering—cheerfully—for any further services that might be needed.

Matt's answers were so satisfactory that he soon found himself on the roof, in a suit of borrowed overalls, assisting a deaf and dumb Swede in reshingling it. Here, high above the street, and with a superb view of the flashing dam that provided the mills with power, he crawled over the roof with his mouth full of nails, and perched himself on the edge of eternity. The deaf and dumb instructions were hard to follow; moreover, they were impatient, and often accompanied by scornful jabs that were calculated to land him in the street; but Matt held on tight, and even burst out laughing at the absurdity of his position.

By degrees he won deaf and dumb approval; got some pats on the back; and soon was sharing an amiable pipe and pounding nails unmolested. He had been so long idle that the work was enjoyable; he whistled as he thought of his sixty dollars a

month; before long, what with "helping out," and "cheerfulness," it would be augmented to seventy-five, and then—! Hammer, hammer, hammer—everything was coming his way. Hammer, hammer, hammer—if only Chris could see him now! Hammer, hammer, hammer—and it was a lot to be young and vigorous and alive, and it would all happen just as she said it would.

At six they knocked off and descended through the skylight to the ghostly, silent interior below. Matt reported at the office and was told to return at seven-thirty for his classes. Mr. Cummins had thawed perceptibly; a physical instructor who could shingle was a gratifying acquisition; he gave Matt a dog-eared volume entitled *Simple Gymnastics,* together with a chart representing the different positions for Holt's Manly Exerciser. It was tacitly assumed that Matt's knowledge needed refreshing, which indeed was so much the case that he hurried through his supper at a ten-cent restaurant in order to fortify himself for what was to come.

He returned to find the gymnasium swarming with young Hungarians in black tights and singlets, and the swimming tank beyond crowded with hilarious bathers. His "classes" were going on merrily without him, and his appearance in their midst seemed almost an intrusion. Black legs were swinging over trapezes; panting youngsters were pulling at the exercisers along the wall; others were contorting themselves on mattresses, or turning frantic

somersaults; the punching-bag was reverberating loudly, and about it rose a quarrelsome outcry, as half a dozen tried to get to it at once. The athletic side of the Y. M. C. A. was well patronized, however small the attendance might be in the other departments.

Matt moved about, wondering what he was to do, and finally decided not to do anything beyond keeping order and encouraging some of the more backward. Whenever he saw any one looking at all helpless and abashed in the general pandemonium, he went up to him and started him pulling at a Holt's Manly Exerciser. He stopped a fist fight and sent the culprits home; stopped a good deal of more or less boisterous horseplay, and gradually asserted a quiet but effective authority. They were a very manageable set, taking it all in all, much more so than the same number of young Americans would have been, and when Mr. Cummins arrived on a flying visit to see how the new instructor was getting on, Matt was not a little pleased to be commended.

By ten the gymnasium was clear, and he was free to return home, which he did with the *Simple Gymnastics* under his arm and the chart of the Manly Exerciser in his pocket—the tiredest man in Manaswan, and the happiest. He had got a job; he had already won praise; he foresaw promotion and Chris! He sat down and scratched off a glad little note; the good news was too big to keep; Chris

should learn by the morning's mail that he had been unexpectedly—gloriously successful.

At breakfast there was one from her, which he tore open and read with a sickening, deadly disappointment. It ran:

"DEAREST:

"It did not seem right not to tell papa, and now all that is left of me is a poor, limp little coward in the blackest disgrace. It was worse than his being cross—I could have stood that—but he took it *dreadfully*—more than I can ever bring myself to tell you. I have promised not to see you for three whole months, and not to write to you again, except this, and I promised for you, too—to do the same. Please, *please* don't blame me too much or reproach me. I had no choice, really I had not, and even the three months was a tremendous concession. He insisted I would forget you in three months, and it seemed wiser to take it as a sort of challenge, specially when he said I would be grateful to him all the days of my life. I must just show him that three months won't make the least, tiny difference—and then say, Papa, I can't help it, but I love him more than ever. My darling, I will, I will, I will, and do not doubt it or my heart will break. He has a right to know that it is serious, hasn't he? That's what he said, over and over again, till I gave way. It commits him to admitting it afterward, and will leave him without any argument. At any rate, I shall obey him for these three months, and then if he doesn't change, you can come and get me.

"I am determined not to wait a minute longer

than that, papa or no papa, and what you must do is to work hard, and be able to support us when the time comes. I have to take your answer for granted as I solemnly promised you would not write to me. Please don't, my darling, for otherwise you will add to my disgrace and make papa think I have no influence with you.

"We're going to Washington to-day so that I may be 'distracted.' I shall be that in all truth, but not in papa's sense, and with a heart like lead at leaving you. Don't blame me too much, for I love him, too, you know, better than anything in the world except you. Try not to feel too badly, and remember I shall be thinking of you every minute of the time. I dread to stop as I have said everything so badly, but it is not the you I love if you do not understand. You will, won't you? And love me better than ever, and don't forget that I will come.

"CHRIS."

Matt re-read the letter many times, and his first sensation of utter abandonment imperceptibly altered to a more sanguine view. They were both saved, at least, the shame of a clandestine affair, with its unavoidable and mortifying discovery. Better to tell the general than to let him find out—Chris had been right there—bravely right. Maybe she had shown good sense, too, in conceding the three months, however bitter they might be to live through. Yes, he "understood" very well. Chris had accepted in the spirit of a test, and the general would find it impossible to impose new conditions. It was much to be thankful for that he had not made it a year. It

would have been so easy for him to make it a year. Three months would give Matt time to solidify his position in the Y. M. C. A., and apply leverage to that sixty dollars a month; the world that loved a lover surely included Mr. Cummins; besides, a helping-out, cheerful instructor would soon be worth that extra fifteen.

No, all was not lost, though it was a smarting, jealous business to have Chris whisked away to be courted and run after in Washington. He choked at the thought, and raged afresh at his own impotence and poverty. Who was he to hold such a woman—young, beautiful, and an heiress? She would meet better men every day, and could not but contrast them with himself. Her father would always be at hand, that cool, shrewd, implacable father, for ever inclining the scales against him. Yet there was something steadfast in Chris that it was immensely comforting to recall, something frank and fearless and smilingly resolute. She had contributed all the courage, had made all the plans. His own part had been one of helplessness throughout, and obedience to a braver will—humiliating reflections, but not without reassurance. All he had was love, and he had lain like a dog at her feet, leaving the rest to her. That's how it had been—the brains, the initiative, the contriving—all hers. Why, then, should he doubt her now? Analyzed, it seemed very foolish. His evident duty was to carry out her instructions, and get seventy-five dollars a month. That was

what the braver will had decreed, and he should set himself to it, faithfully, unquestioningly.

He took the road to the Young Men's Christian Association with a dogged determination not to borrow trouble, studying the *Simple Gymnastics* on the way, and cramming what he could of it into his seething and tormented head. Stopping at a store, in accordance with Mr. Cummins' request of overnight, he chose a suit of overalls and the regulation tights and singlet—which were charged—and a couple of coarse, blue flannel shirts which he paid for—and went on, with the parcel under his arm.

He changed his clothes in the gymnasium, which was as lifeless as the rest of the building, and applied himself vigorously to his task. In a couple of hours the floors had been scrubbed, the windows cleaned, the apparatus polished, the bathing suits set out in long lines to dry, and the tank ready for a new influx of young mill hands. Then he went up to join the deaf and dumb Swede on the roof, who greeted him with inarticulate cries, like those of a walrus on a rock, and a welcoming wave of the hammer. Matt crawled over, shook hands, lit his pipe, and was soon shingling with a professional deliberation, not to say slowness, that his companion insisted on.

Thus the long day passed, and the busy, noisy evening came and went, and one's head was no sooner on the pillow than it seemed time to rise again. The days that followed were all alike, and by degrees the world contracted till it consisted of

nothing but the Y. M. C. A. at one end and Mrs. Sattane's at the other, with a mile of streets between. Yet Matt was not unhappy; you need leisure to be unhappy; and he was sustained, moreover, by a determination to succeed. That he was doing so was indubitable; Mr. Cummins was friendliness itself; Mr. Phelps and Mr. Stader, the assistants, had been taught to swim, and were correspondingly grateful; that vague, impressive body, "the directors," had been statistically cheered by an increased attendance, which included a "business men's class," that swung dumb-bells and moved to music every Tuesday and Friday night.

Altogether, the new instructor had good reason to be satisfied, and might look forward to a raise in salary as something he had well earned. He would not overreach himself, however, by asking for it prematurely; he was too wary for that, and was playing for too big a stake. With only three weeks gone from the three months, he felt he had no time to spare.

The change in his circumstances had cost him much of his former social popularity, and as he was at no pains to preserve the little that remained he was soon dropped by those who had once entertained and run after him. The young women of his acquaintance were less snobbish than their parents, and some strove hard to keep him, even though he had fallen so far from his bygone glory; but he had no time to pay calls or go to parties; no money to

spend, and was wholly engrossed in the one single-hearted purpose of his life. They might write him scented notes, or waylay him on the street, but nothing could lure him back; and several pretty faces grew very overcast indeed, and finally passed him by with their pretty noses in the air. It cost him a pang, of course; Matt would not have been human if it had not; but he had to concentrate every faculty in qualifying for that seventy-five a month, and saving what he could of his sixty. So socially he died, and was buried, and Manaswan knew him no more.

One morning Mr. Cummins called him into the office, and fidgeting with some papers in his hand, regarded Matt with considerable embarrassment.

"I'm afraid I have bad news for you," he said, in his very low voice. "I have been told to let you go."

"Discharge me?" exclaimed Matt, unable to believe his ears. "You don't mean that I am—fired?"

Mr. Cummins nodded, with an expression almost as woebegone as Matt's. "It's none of my doing, Broughton," he explained. "You are the best man I have ever had in that department, and it came like a thunderclap to me. It's worse than unjust, and I said so flat out—but orders are orders, and I am only the paid superintendent under the board."

"But what do they complain of?"

Mr. Cummins hesitated.

"The funny thing is that I don't know," he replied at last. "I couldn't get a reason out of one of them. But somehow they are prejudiced against

you,—have instructed me to dismiss you at once. Your only means of getting back at them is to demand a full month's salary, and if I were you, I would do it, and sue them if they refuse."

Matt's lip curled. "Give me what I have earned," he said. "To take more would be like robbing the poor-box. If I'm out—I'm out—and that's the end of it."

"A very Christian way to take it, Broughton—a very Christian and praiseworthy way to take it. Get your things, and Mr. Phelps will settle with you at the desk."

Matt was settled with at the desk by Mr. Phelps, and left the building with a check for forty-seven dollars, a paper package containing his overalls, a flannel shirt, his black tights and singlet, and within his breast a heavy and anxious heart. The world was before him again, and that seventy-five dollars was farther away than ever.

CHAPTER XIV

A LIGHT DAWNS ON MATT

FORLORN and discouraged, Matt sought out the only man in Manaswan that he could rely on. He needed more than a job; he needed a friend, and where else was he more likely to find one than in Victor's garage?

Daggancourt was working over a car, and it was not until he had been nudged by a helper that he straightened himself, and recognized Matt. He tried to look unconcerned, but there was a telltale quiver of the cheek, and a startled, constrained air about him which showed his agitation. He grasped Matt's extended hand in both his own and bent his gray old head to hide his emotion.

"We've both been fools, Victor," said Matt. "I was ashamed to tell you that they had stolen my money—yes, got clean away with it in San Francisco—and then you took it all wrong and froze up like a silly old iceberg. I wasn't very considerate, I'll admit, and I'm sorry, and—"

"That's all right, Marse' Broughton," interrupted the mulatto, lapsing into a broader accent than was his wont. "A gentleman can't say more than he's sorry, and God knows you have made me mighty

glad and thankful. I didn't understand, that's all—I didn't understand."

"I'm pretty hard pushed, Victor. Can you find me anything here?"

"Find you anything here, sir?"

"Yes, a job. It needn't be anything much to begin with. Let me wash cars—anything."

"Is it as bad as that, Marse' Broughton?"

Daggancourt was shocked, and slowly took in Matt's shabby appearance and his tanned, careworn face. "Well, if that doesn't break me all up to hear you say that."

"Can you make room for me?"

The mulatto reflected.

"It isn't much of a business," he said, indicating the garage. "It don't pay like mules—but if you care to come in as partner, you can have half of what there is."

"But I haven't a cent, Victor. I didn't mean anything like that. I meant a job—two dollars a day, perhaps."

"I didn't expect any money, Marse' Broughton. You misjudge me when you say that. They call me a cranky old nigger, and it may be I am, but I am most awful cranky in liking you—and if you are willing, sure I am."

The generosity of the offer overcame Matt, but he could not bring himself to take advantage of it. The garage, small as it was, represented the savings of years; and to appropriate half and give nothing

but his unskilled services in return was simply impossible. It was finally arranged, however, that he was to be engaged at seventy-five dollars a month as "demonstrator" of the Jonesmobile, with a percentage on all sales he might make.

Victor had recently acquired the agency for this vehicle, which was a spidery, buggy contrivance on carriage wheels that sold for four hundred and fifty dollars and was supposed to make a peculiar appeal to farmers. Even to Matt's unpracticed eyes it had a queer look, as though it had lost its Buggins and was wondering what had become of its shafts; but Daggancourt was technically enthusiastic and prophesied vast possibilities. A Jonesmobile could climb anything, and go anywhere, and had an extension back that would hold a calf or a sack of potatoes. It could also be jacked up to churn butter, or saw wood, or do the family washing; and there was a little book with pictures of it performing these prodigies and winning universal esteem. Farmers were quoted who "did not know how they had ever got along without it," and others whose annual repair bills varied from twelve to forty-nine cents; and there were unblushing accounts of continental trips and the ascent of Pike's Peak by this barnyard favorite in its off hours.

Matt's instructions began at once, and very delightful and inspiring it was, too, as he hung over Daggancourt, elucidating mysteries, and asking a pupil's innumerable questions. Occasionally cars

ran in that required gasolene or water, or a small adjustment, or a tire changed—and then Matt bestirred himself to be useful, if only it were to pump till he was crimson, or hand tools to Mack or Louey.

With his seventy-five dollars assured, an interesting occupation before him, and a partnership whenever he chose to take it—he felt that all his troubles were over and that his foot at last was on the ladder of independence. He was in a glow of contentment and good-will; Daggancourt, the Jonesmobile, the lathes and drills, and the whole long, low, dark garage was seen in the reflection of that inner sunshine. Sitting in the climber of Pike's Peak, and teetering to and fro under the guidance of a black paw, he leaped in imagination to fortune and to Chris.

Before the week was out he was a full-fledged "demonstrator" and able to run the Jonesmobile almost as well as he could talk it. He knew all about batteries now, and buzzers, and check valves, and commutators and frozen gears, and had accumulated memories of lonely roads and long walks to the nearest telephone for help. Sometimes it was the Jonesmobile's fault, though often as not his, and many a big laugh went up in the garage at his expense. He swept daily over the countryside, with his lunch in the tool-box, and stopped at every likely farm-house with an invitation for a ride.

He made an excellent salesman; the women liked his good-looking face and pleasant manners; the

men, while they victimized him without mercy, never ruffled his patience nor extorted from him an angry word. Lean old grafters with no more intention of buying a Jonesmobile than an airship were carried hundreds of miles and regularly saved up their town errands till they could get "that there city feller with the benzine buggy." They would lead him on with a beautifully pretended indecision, and then would be found in a competitor's car, shamelessly repeating the performance.

Matt, too, was poorly supported by the Jonesmobile. Nothing ever went wrong with it as long as it bore one of these amiable swindlers, but once there was a genuine, eager, would-be purchaser in the seat its tendency was to sputter and give out. It seemed to save up every disaster for these rare occasions; wheels came off, spark-plugs cracked, carburetors decided to carburet no more—as the sale was on the eve of being clenched.

But, everything considered, Matt did very well. In eighteen days he sold two cars, pocketing a ten-dollar commission on each. Victor was jubilant; keep up that record and they would be rich; keep up that record and in a year they might sell out and go to mule-raising. The old fellow still dreamed of Kentucky and that little cabin in the blue hills.

It was an agreeable gypsy sort of life. It had the open-air charm of a bandit's, with none of the risk, but the same possibilities of sudden rich prizes. A

thousand farms invited attack, and the prowling Jonesmobile, often in the guise of a wayfarer wanting the right road, or the favor of a glass of milk, insinuated itself into many a defenseless household. It was part of Matt's policy, also, to give a lift to any trudging, weary figure on foot; to pick up children on their way to school or home; to take advantage of every opportunity to offer assistance and a copy of the little book. Spring was well advanced; all nature was green and budding; it was exhilarating to dart along in the Jonesmobile, making strange acquaintances and looking for adventures, and never knowing what there might be in store at the next turn of the road.

It was sad, indeed, when it came to an end. One evening, after supper, Daggancourt took Matt to one side and with profound depression said that it was "all up."

"It came like a bum-shell," he quavered. "You know, I started the business on nothing, four years ago, and borrowed twenty-five hundred dollars of old Farelly, the money-lender, at twelve per cent. The banks wouldn't have looked at it, for all I had was a kit of tools and a name for being honest, and it was Farelly's own idea when the place came under the hammer. I had worked for him once, and he had taken a fancy to me, often saying that no Jew ought to throw stones at a colored man; so that was how I got the garage, and I met the interest every month, right to the last cent—every month, for

four years, as regular as clockwork, though I never managed to get ahead much on the principal, and mighty pressed at times to manage that."

"Well, go on," said Matt, as Victor choked back a sob.

"I thought he was a very fine man," the latter continued. "There was nobody I looked up to like old Mr. Farelly, and though folks spoke against him, and called him a Shylock, I knew better—for if it hadn't been for him I should still have been working for wages. Twelve per cent. was mighty high, but not too high, considering the security, which didn't amount to a hill of beans—and I never grudged a penny of the interest and paid it most pleased and grateful. Now to-day he comes up to me and says, old Farelly does—out of a clear sky, and without the least warning, just as he was writing the receipt in my office with a fountain-pen: 'I have to call in that twenty-five hundred, Victor, and will ask you to make an immediate settlement.' I said: 'Marse' Farelly, that isn't fair; as God sees us, that isn't fair, and I could no more do it than I could fly.' Then he flubbles with his fountain-pen, and sticks it back most careful in his vest-pocket, and says: 'Then you'll have to get out!' "

"And didn't he make any explanation?"

"No, Marse' Broughton, he did not make any explanation, though when I thought of the little business, and of you doing so splendidly with the Jonesmobile, and perhaps our going away together to

Kentucky, I almost went down on my knees to him. It's hard for a man to demean himself—get right down and eat dirt—but I did it, Marse' Broughton, and I pleaded and begged something awful, for the business is just beginning to pay, and it was almost like I had been robbed of it. In the eyes of God I am being robbed of it, for it's mine, and ought to stay mine as long as I paid his interest, which I did, month in, month out, no matter how it pinched. But he wouldn't listen to a word, Marse' Broughton —not a word, though I got out the books and wanted to show him in black and white how well I stood. But he pushed them away, saying 'money talks,' and what he wanted was his, or I'd be sold up."

Matt's attention was disturbed by a thought that grew and grew more insistent as the mulatto poured out the tale of Farelly's amazing perfidy. He remembered his singular dismissal from the Y. M. C. A. and, incredible as it might seem, asked himself whether there was not some connection between it and this unexpected catastrophe; and whether behind both there was not, somehow or other, a mysterious connection with Mr. Kay. With a dawning fear of something deeper and more underhanded in the old money-lender's action than Victor had any idea of, he interrupted the latter to make certain that Farelly had left the garage without offering the least compromise.

"He didn't give me as much as a pin-hole to crawl

through," Daggancourt explained explosively. "Not a week's grace—nothing—but just get right out and be damned, and shoving away the books like they burned his skinny old fingers. But listen, Marse' Broughton, that ain't the end of it. There's worse than that."

"Worse?" cried Matt, unable to conceive how it could be worse, and more perplexed than ever.

"As soon as he was gone, I reached for my hat and made a bee-line for P. R. Powell," continued Victor. "He's the one who wanted to buy me out for sixteen hundred dollars cash and take over Farelly's notes. Been at me for two months past, plaguing and pestering to beat the band. Well, what do you think when I got to the Delmonico garage where he's foreman! Hemmed and hawed, he did, and couldn't make it more than seven hundred. Had been tipped off, don't you see, and knew that Farelly was going to put me on the street! I would have traded at sixteen hundred and been glad of it—thankful, Marse' Broughton, to have saved that much from the wreck. But seven hundred! Good God, perhaps I ought to have took it. But I just couldn't—I just couldn't."

"I believe I can get you out of this," said Matt. "It may be crazy, but let's try it. Here, I'll write it on the back of an envelope."

Victor was astounded; his face, as withered as old leather, screwed itself up into a thousand wrinkles. "Try what?" he demanded.

"You sit down and copy this off, and have it in his letter-box inside of an hour:

" 'DEAR MR. FARELLY:

" 'Looking back on our interview, I fear I was not in a state best to explain the prosperous condition of the garage, or how really unwise it would be in your own interests to terminate my connection with it. The fact was that I was very much upset by another matter, a row I had had with my demonstrator shortly before you came in. This fellow Broughton acted abominably, and I had to threaten him with a constable before he would go, and afterward he came back again, and tried to clean out the shop with a piece of lead pipe. Excuse me for bothering you with all this, but I am sure that if you will let me bring you the books, and show you how well the garage is going, you will reconsider your wish to call in the note. Our agency prospects are very bright, and the sale of two Jonesmobiles in eighteen days speaks for itself. I feel positive I can satisfy you in regard to everything, if you will only be so very kind as to let me come and go over the figures.

" 'Respectfully yours,
" 'VICTOR DAGGANCOURT.' "

"And I'm to write him that?" asked the mulatto, taking the envelope, which had been torn open and was scribbled all over—looking from it to Matt with an expression of utter bewilderment. "Sakes alive, Marse' Broughton, what in the name of goodness do you want me to do that for?"

"Because I think I know what's the matter with

Mr. Farelly. I may be wrong, but I believe the whole scheme is simply to get me out of my job. That's why I put in the lead pipe and all that—and mind you, stick to it, Victor, for all you're worth."

"But why should Farelly do that? Excuse me, Marse' Broughton, but you're all off. I might as will send him a picture post-card of the Masonic building as this here letter."

"You try it and see."

"But what's your job got to do with Mr. Farelly? Or why should he care one way or the other?"

"Victor, I'm in deeper waters than I dare tell you. Mind, I may be wrong about Farelly, but don't you think he's acting very strangely?"

"Most certainly he is, Marse' Broughton. "Cutting off his nose to spite his face, as one might say. No sense to it at all."

"What motive could he have in turning on you like that?"

"None that I can make out—though if I might venture to ask—"

"Ask what? Go on."

Victor seemed afraid to answer.

"You're acting kind of queer, too," he said at last, with a touch of querulousness. "What do you mean by those deeper waters?"

"That there is more in this than appears on the surface."

"Marse' Broughton, can't you trust me?"

"Trust you? Of course I trust you. Only—"

"Only what, sir?"

"Victor, it's like this; I have got hold of a little piece of a big secret—something extraordinary, inexplicable, involving the best friend I have in the world; and I am on my honor to him to keep my mouth shut. If it wasn't for that promise, I'd tell you everything."

"Oh, Marse' Broughton, that's enough—it was that I took you up wrong, you saying deeper waters like a slap in my face. I'm sorry I was so touchy."

"Don't mention it. It was only that I wanted you to understand—that was all."

"Sure I do now, Marse' Broughton."

"Well, Victor, this friend of mine has enemies—people with apparently unlimited money, who first tried to buy what I know; and then tried to frighten it out of me; and now, do you know what I am tempted to think?"

"What, sir?"

"That they are trying to starve me into submission."

"You believe they are back of old Mr. Farelly—that it was their doing—calling in his notes?"

"Yes."

"To ruin me for no other purpose than hitting at you?"

"That's my idea."

"Then I guess you don't know old man Farelly, Marse' Broughton, or you would never dream of such a thing. He isn't the one to worry about dem-

onstrators or their jobs, or to join in any Black Hand business. Take it from me, Marse' Broughton, he has his own reasons for wanting to get me out, and this letter of yours is nothing but foolishness and waste of paper; excuse me for saying so."

"Perhaps it is, but I want you to send it, just the same."

"Wouldn't it be wiser to talk over Powell's offer, and maybe accept it, mighty hard though it is? Suppose we take it, and get a shed somewhere and make out as best we can with the Jonesmobile? Two cars in eighteen days is some selling, and the law gives me my tools. What do you say to that, Marse' Broughton?"

"One thing at a time, Victor. You get that letter off to Farelly as quick as you can."

"It ain't a bit of use, sir. Really and truly, Marse' Broughton, it ain't a bit of use."

"Do it to oblige me, anyhow."

"I'd rather go around with the lead pipe you spoke of, and try it on his old head. That's about the only thing that would ever persuade old man Farelly to change his mind, once it was made up. Writing him letters is like putting salt on a bird's tail. Why, Marse' Broughton, he don't know there is such a person on earth as you."

"That's where I disagree with you. Let's make sure."

"You insist on it?"

"I would do more than that for you, Victor."

"All right, Marse' Broughton—though couldn't you cut out some of the humble pie?"

"Not a bite of it! You write it just the way it is, and then leave it at his house to-night."

They went over the letter, rewriting an illegible word here and there, and changing a few for others. Had it been his own death-warrant, the darky could not have been more dejected, and he argued and grumbled at every phrase. Finally, a clean copy was made in Matt's bedroom, and Daggancourt shuffled off with it, vowing again that it wasn't a bit of use.

The next morning Matt treated himself to the luxury of getting up late; so late, indeed, that Daggancourt had already gone, leaving no message. Matt idled about, waiting for news, not daring to go to the garage lest he be seen, nor to use the telephone which might find Farelly in the garage office. It was an unfortunate choice of a holiday, if so anxious an inactivity could be called a holiday, for Hunter Hoyt was rampageously drunk, and scandalized everybody that passed the house.

He had got possession of a broom, and was charging about with it like an overgrown child, draped in a blue table-cloth, laughing uproariously, and pretending to be a national guardsman on strike duty. He was in that vile condition where the only defense against a tipsy man is to humor him, and one is forced to endure every indignity with no alternative save calling in the police. With his broom lowered to the charge he ran at Daggancourt when the

mulatto finally appeared, excited and breathless—prodding him hilariously and shouting: "Back, mobsh, back, keep off company's premishes! Advance, nash' guard, and give 'em the bayonet! Rush 'em, boysh, rush 'em!"

It was with this accompaniment of broom-thrusts and horseplay that Matt learned what had happened. The letter had been miraculously successful; yes, old Farelly, after a pretense of examining the books, had professed himself entirely satisfied; the notes were not to be called in; everything was to go on as before; the garage was saved!

"What clenched it was when I said I'd have to find another boarding-place," added Daggancourt, with a puckered grin. "Said I was afraid to stop where you was, may the Lord forgive me."

"Didn't I tell you! The whole thing was aimed at me, Victor."

By this time they were beyond the reach of the nash' guard, which was ceremoniously escorting Miss Gibbs to her buggy.

"You were right in saying it was deep waters," said Daggancourt, lowering his voice. "For God's sake, get away from here, Marse' Broughton, or worse may come of it. Get away quick, and here's a hundred and fifty dollars I drew at the bank."

Matt pushed the money back. "No, no, Victor," he exclaimed. "I'm going to stick it out. I am going to stay in Manaswan if it rains wildcats!"

CHAPTER XV

PALE FACES AND PINK LETTERS

THERE are occasions when the office seeks the man—much to the man's astonishment. Matt, wandering through the mill district in search of employment, happened to meet a former Y. M. C. A. pupil of his, a swarthy, fiercely-whiskered young fellow named Dorotka, who was a machinist in one of the shoe factories. Dorotka had been in the Austrian navy, and this had been a great bond between him and his former instructor. He had a European's intense respect for one who has worn an officer's uniform, and he had valued Matt's easy *camaraderie,* repaying it with a deference that helped not a little to maintain discipline in the gymnasium. He was for ever touching his forelock and saying: "Yes, Lieutenant"—"No, Lieutenant"—"Very good, Lieutenant"—delighting to make others stare and appreciate the fact that they had two naval veterans in their midst.

Well, here was Dorotka, smiling from ear to ear, and so happy at encountering his lost lieutenant that he could have danced. He had been looking for Matt everywhere, yaas, everywhere, asking everybody, "Vare is Mr. Broughton—oh, vare is Mr. Brough-

ton?"—Would the highborn come into the Radiwiczky saloon and drink glass-beer? Please, it was to talk peeziness, vairy important peeziness. That is, if the lieutenant was out of a yob. Was the lieutenant out of a yob? Good! Fine! A glass-beer—and something to surprise the highborn vairy mooch.

At the bar, which was set at the end of a cut-throat cellar—and over a couple of frothing steins, the highborn was more fully informed of the "peeziness" that would "surprise him." Dorotka, it seemed, was engaged to be married to Kitty Jankovitch, who worked in the same factory with him. Now Kitty wished to raise a girls' military corps of which she was to be captain. They were all to wear white sweaters, dark short skirts, white gaiters and white caps, and the corps was to be called the "White Cadets." Fifty girls had agreed to join and contribute twenty cents a week each toward the salary of an instructor, for the lack of whom the project was now languishing.

"The whole manual, Lieutenant," explained Dorotka. "With toy guns and tin swords—zip, zaff, zooff, attention! Present arms! Prrrrrr!—And there is a little Canadian hoonchback named Célestine, who ta-ra-ra-ra-ra real elegant on the keyboogle."

Matt, though amused, was not backward in volunteering his services, thanking Dorotka profusely for the opportunity. Ten dollars a week was not to be sneezed at, and if the corps fever spread

it might easily double. Dorotka said that the firm had offered the girls the use of a loft, and Mr. Highton, the boss, had further promised the corps a silk flag, and all there remained to do was "to feex it up with Kitty."

This young lady was somehow communicated with, and descended in a freight-elevator with a shawl over her head, to meet them at the factory entrance. She was a thick-set, vivacious little person, with a broad, good-humored face, and an air of galloping decision; and when she talked there was not a bit of her broad, good-humored face that did not join in and help, beginning at her mouth, and quivering up her cheek, and wrinkling her nose, and waggling her eyebrows, and streaking her forehead; and she could listen just as energetically, and every word you said ran over her like a small earthquake.

Matt liked her at once, and she liked Matt, and the preliminaries were soon settled and earthquaked all over her. So he would not think it beneath him to drill a lot of girls, and he would not scold them if they made mistakes, and got all tangled up. And was ten dollars a week enough, for they couldn't pay no more than twenty cents each, and it would even be a trouble to jolt that out of some of them? And how short ought their skirts to be, and need they wear gloves? Gloves were elegant, but many of the girls thought white ones would make their hands look too big. What did the lieutenant think

about gloves, and was it too much like policemen? They didn't want to be called the lady cops, did they? And, of course, they wanted a Sunday drill too—one every night except Saturday, so as not to miss the balls, though they would give one of their own before long to raise money and show the boys how cute they looked.

In this headlong and rather incoherent fashion Matt found himself engaged; an appointment was made the same evening for eight o'clock, and Captain Kitty stepped back on the freight-elevator and disappeared from view. Dorotka, who was employed in another part of the building, excused himself and scurried away; and Matt, left alone beneath the vast rumbling structure, thought what a strange world it was, and how good and kind some of its least considered people were. He thought too, not without a pleasurable vindictiveness, that here was an occupation that was Mr. Kay-proof. He had been shoveled out of the Y. M. C. A., and shoveled out of the garage, but if Kitty were anything of a sample of the White Cadets they were to be relied on through thick and thin. His drill was probably somewhat antiquated, but was all the better for that. He had been trained in the school of close formations, which from the spectacular point of view were considerably more effective than the modern. What the Cadets wanted was not soldiering, but a brisk, pretty ballet—zip, zaff, zoof, as Dorotka had said—with fifty white gaiters stepping

out with precision, while all their respective Dorotkas looked on and applauded. They should have it, by George, and it would be no fault of his if the White Cadets did not create a sensation, and cover themselves with glory.

Looking back on it afterward those drills in the loft always stood out in his memory with a peculiar pathos. The girls were so poor, so willing, so gay and so infinitely painstaking; the jaunty caps set so incongruously on the tousled heads; the home-made gaiters encased such very thick legs; the hands that held the toy guns and waved the tin swords were so calloused with toil—so grimy and large. And the solemnity of it! The tears that flowed down those pale, puffy faces, when again and again they blundered and misunderstood! The little hunchback with the bugle, who forgot her deformity as she sounded the blithe calls—inspiring and inspired! And the elephantine tramp of those hundred feet as they shook the floor in measured reverberations!

Matt's popularity was unbounded; his earnestness, patience and good-nature gained for him an idolizing devotion. Erect and handsome, swinging his light cane, he was to the girls their ideal of everything distinguished and aristocratic—their realization of those story-book heroes of romance whom they had dreamed of but never known. It became the custom to wear little stamp pictures of him in gilt brooches; a word of praise was cherished, and repeated rapturously; Célestine, the

hunchback, was regarded as the most favored of mortals, for it was to her—and to her only—that Matt allowed himself to show any preference; and many a sturdy cadet would have changed places with her gladly, hump and all.

The corps was a success from the start. In a week it was sixty-three strong, and divided into two companies, with company officers, and Kitty promoted to a majority. No one defaulted on her twenty cents; and Kitty, who was also treasurer and secretary, checked off the roll every Saturday night, and handed Matt a bulky bag of dimes. The general progress was remarkable; the girls were twice as teachable as men, and not nearly so backward or stupid; they saw the drill as a new and complicated dance, and interested themselves in it with the same ardor. From a gawky, ridiculous, uncertain hodge-podge they were soon transformed into a faultless and alert body that it was a pleasure to watch. White gaiters whisked in perfect unison; wooden guns banged the floor or rose in white arms with an inspiriting regularity; every evolution was performed not merely well, but with a zest and swing that made Matt proud of his White Cadets.

A band was spoken of; a public parade; possibly a reception to the Governor on the Fourth of July and a subsequent review in front of the City Hall. The White Cadets chafed at blooming unseen in the factory loft, and longed for the time when they

might march through the streets, with drums beating and colors flying, to the amazement and admiration of all beholders. Meanwhile, they worked with a will and adored their instructor, buying him a real sword, which was presented to him by a committee, much to his—and their—embarrassment. He was immensely touched, for that subscription must have lightened many a lunch-pail, and cut off many a pickle or frankfurter or scrap of finery—the sword being quite a sword, with a gold-plated handle, richly chased, and an engraved inscription on the blade. Yes, so touched, that his heart was very full indeed, and brimmed over with tenderness for his funny command; and he went through the ranks, shaking hands with every one of them, and telling them, not without emotion, how happy and how grateful he was.

One Monday night when as usual he mounted the dingy stairway to the upper stories of the factory, a strange, furious buzzing reached his ears, warning him that something was seriously amiss in the loft. He hastened his steps, and burst in on the Cadets, expecting to stop a hair-pulling match, or one of those squabbles that will happen in even the best regulated of girls' corps. There was a dead silence at his entrance, and as he advanced into the room he wondered to see no one in uniform, and wondered still more at the fierce, lowering looks that met him on every side. Suddenly there was a cry of "Oh, there he is, the dirty wretch!" and with

that the whole assembly made a rush at him, yelling like so many Indians, and engulfing him in a biting, scratching, snarling, kicking, punching mob.

Before he could realize what was happening, his face was scratched, his clothes were half off his back, and he was defending himself for very life. Once they nearly had him down, and there was nothing pathetic now in those big feet, savagely lunging at him, and ready to scrunch him under their heels. With a superhuman effort he righted himself, and as a hat-pin dug into his side, began to push them away violently with his hands. It was a disagreeable thing to do—to be forced to do—but he was being murdered by those insane women, and self-preservation is the first law. They screeched, they screamed, they fainted, they clawed him with renewed ferocity; hanging to his back, his legs, and stabbing at him with their venomous hat-pins, till everything swam before him, and his one coherent instinct was to reach the wash-room in the corner of the loft.

He got to it somehow; swung round, and shook off his pursuers, and then, slamming the door in their faces, bolted it—while those sixty-three voices howled like wolves outside. The partitions did not run to the ceiling, but only to the height of about nine feet; he pulled himself up to one of these narrow ledges, and pantingly gazed on the pandemonium below. The storm had spent its worst; the wounded were being revived and unlaced; there was

no concerted attempt to smash in the door, though half a dozen furies were pounding on it, and vociferating with the full strength of their lungs. The sight of him, perched on the summit of the partition, was the signal for a bellow of execration, which gradually quieted, as he raised his hand and tried to speak. Just as he was beginning to make himself heard a toy gun was flung at him, and a cheer of delight followed as it grazed his forehead, and tumbled to the floor. Disregarding the blow he raised his hand again, demanding silence, silence, *silence!*

By degrees the cadets hushed, more curious than cowed, and derisively obedient.

"Will some one kindly tell me what's the matter?" he asked.

There was a hubbub of response, an undistinguishable roar, and a flutter of bits of paper waved at him with a significance he was at a loss to understand. Picking out Kitty in the crowd he made another attempt, addressing his question to her alone.

"Kitty," he cried, "won't you answer for the lot? What the devil has happened?"

"You're a low, dirty, contemptible swine!" exclaimed Kitty amid loud approval, and more waving of those sheets of paper. They were pink, he noticed, and seemed to be letters.

"For God's sake, what have I done?" he roared. "What am I accused of?"

It was Célestine who replied this time.

"You might have left me out of it," she said, with

a break in her voice. "It's bad enough being what I am, without being guyed and pointed at and made a goat of like the rest."

"Made a goat of? What do you mean? I haven't made a goat of anybody."

Célestine forced her way through the seething mass, and on tiptoe held up one of the pink letters.

"Oh, ain't it true?" she asked with an altered expression. "Say, didn't you send that to every one of us Sunday afternoon, by a light-complected young man with pompadour hair?"

Matt read the letter, which was not only on pink paper, but emitted a penetrating perfume and was written in a round copybook hand with elaborate flourishes:

"My Own Sweetest, Dearest Darling:

"How can I tell you here all the love that is in my pining heart? Will it surprise you to know that I have loved you madly ever since I seen you in your cute little cap and uniform? Ah, believe me, it has been hard not to show it, and I have had to steel my aching heart every night at drill, and pretend not to care all the time it nearly killed me. This is to ask won't you meet me in front of the post-office at eight o'clock sharp, and let me fold my longing arms around the prettiest and dearest sweetheart that ever gladdened a lover's eyes? Breathe it not to anybody. Keep sacred the secret of our love. But come, come, and let me press your lovely form to my heart, and tell you with passionate kisses that there is only one girl in the world for me, and she is

you. I shall have an auto waiting around the corner, so please dress up warm, and tell the folks you will not be back till late.

"Thine, and forever thine,
"MATTHEW BROUGHTON."

For a moment he was speechless. He stared at the White Cadets, and the White Cadets stared at him. Then he asked Célestine how many of the girls had received this—this—detestable forgery.

"All of them," answered the little hunchback.

"And how many went?"

"All of them," said Célestine chokingly. "There was such a jam the street-cars couldn't get through, and—"

The rest of her sentence was lost in a din that almost took the roof off. The Cadets were inflamed afresh at the memory of their wrongs. Alas, for the love that had turned to hate in sixty-three heaving bosoms. They might have been sixty-three tigers, and yowled as bloodthirstily. Guns flew, old boots, chairs, tin swords, the regimental records—with Matt dodging like a monkey on a stick, and rending the air with protestations of innocence. But even when the tumult died down no one would believe him except Célestine, who took his part like a little heroine, repeating every word he said in a shrill staccato, and adding torrents of her own. Then Matt grew angry at being misjudged; he was smarting and sore both inside and out; he dropped

to the floor and faced them with the intrepidity of a man whose temper was boiling.

"I am done with you," he cried. "You are a lot of fools! I have told you the truth, and all you do is to hoot and yell. I'm sick of explaining and not being believed. I resign! Do you hear? I resign!"

He stalked slowly to the stairs, a lane opening out before him, and not a soul lifting a finger to check or attack him. But he had scarcely taken a dozen steps before he heard them behind him, as with locked arms and four abreast, they followed, compact and revengeful. At the bottom of the first flight the murmur of voices resolved itself into a sort of chorus. "Boo, Boo, Mr. Boo! Boo, Boo, we're on to you!" they chanted in unison. "Boo, Boo, Mr. Boo! Boo, Boo, we're on to you!" till the huge, empty building reëchoed in every cranny with the lugubrious refrain.

It continued to the street, all the riff-raff joining the procession, and pleased to add their hearty concurrence to the hounding of that hatless, collarless, torn and scratched tatterdemalion who limped along in front.

"Boo, Boo, Mr. Boo! Boo, Boo, we're on to you!" With windows opening, people running, saloons pouring out their mouth-wiping customers, and all mill-town frantically astir. It is difficult to estimate the precise slur conveyed by "Boo, Boo, Mr. Boo! Boo, Boo, we're on to you!" but as a

means of expressing public disapproval it was hideously effective. Not daring to run lest he should unloose an avalanche behind him, and become the victim of a mob that increased in size and anger at every yard, Matt was compelled to lengthen out the agony of the most mortifying experience that had ever fallen to his lot.

"Boo, Boo, Mr. Boo! Boo, Boo, we're on to you!" Block by block; up one street and down another; across the bridge, and past the dark, wide river—no respite, no mercy, no help from anywhere. One lone figure leading; unnumbered hundreds marching behind; and that never-ending "Boo, Boo, Mr. Boo! Boo, Boo, we're on to you!" At last, however, as the lights grew far apart, and residences and gardens loomed on either side, the ranks wavered and thinned; the chorus diminished; the mill-town legs lagged, and mill-town throats gave out. Matt strode on unattended. Soon his own footfall was the only sound that disturbed the stillness of the night; he increased his pace to a trot, and in a few minutes more was safe on Mrs. Sattane's porch, and awaiting his chance to slip up unobserved to his room.

CHAPTER XVI

DEATH'S TWIN BROTHER

IT must not be supposed that the boarders had failed to follow Matt's career with a keen and palpitating interest. They would not have been boarders—nor human—had he not become the most engrossing subject of their thoughts. The decline of the kanaka king to overalls and wages had been regarded with an absorption only comparable to that of a savant with a new microbe under his microscope. Every development was excitedly discussed; sympathy and advice were poured out in unstinted quantities; his battle to earn a living in Manaswan and his successive defeats had roused that little household to an unimaginable degree.

The boarders were much more concerned with him than he was with the boarders, who, in his intense preoccupation, became mere chattering phantoms, and hardly distinguishable from the wall-paper behind them. Mr. Crowther fell ill; Mr. Crowther had a crisis and rallied; Mr. Crowther had a crisis and died—and it all slid past Matt like water off a duck's back. A lover is the greatest of egoists; cities may fall in ruins; tens of thousands of Japs may kill tens of thousands of Russians;

political convulsions may shake and thunder—and what does Mr. Lover care? Just nothing.

Of course, in some vague, dim way Matt knew that Mr. Crowther had been gathered to his fathers. In the same vague, dim way he was sorry for Mrs. Crowther, who still bicycled over to lunch and dinner. Even to his absent attention she appeared to be supporting her bereavement with unusual calm. Everybody had told her "to try and bear up"—and she had borne up, with a demure and increasing cheerfulness. "He has gone to a better country," said Mrs. Sattane, looking out on Jefferson Avenue with an air that implied Manaswan and the state of Connecticut. To which the widow replied: "He has, he has," as though perhaps, after all, it was for the best. "More to be envied than grieved for," added the landlady. "That's what I keep telling myself," agreed Mrs. Crowther, rolling her pretty blue eyes, and wiping them with a very dry lace handkerchief. "He is better off where he is."

This digression is necessary to explain the events that came after Matt's resignation—to put it gracefully—from the command of the White Cadets. Lying on a sofa, court-plastered all over, and bandaged like a survivor of a railway wreck, he found himself alone with Mrs. Crowther after lunch. She had a proposal to make, she said, and prefaced it by stating the difficulties of her position.

"It isn't that I don't know the business inside

out," she explained. "Poor dear Charley wouldn't have been anywhere if it hadn't been for me. I have been the brains of it for years, for my father belonged to the same profession, and almost my first memory was playing peek-a-boo among the coffins. It isn't that, Mr. Broughton. But people who send for us expect a man—must have a man. They expect somebody grave, somebody tall and friendly and mournful, who will touch their dear ones with reverence, and arrange the sad formalities in a Prince Albert coat. I lost the Townleys on that account—very tony people—who were good for a two-hundred-dollar casket. They sniffed when they saw it was only a woman, though we had buried Mr. T's mother and Mrs. T's G. A. R. uncle—and there they were, telephoning for the Pritchard Undertaking Company before I was out of the house. If the business and connection is to be kept together, you see I simply must have a man, and the boarders have been talking it over and said why not you."

An undertaker! Matt's goose-flesh shivered at the idea. It was less a dread of corpses, and coffins, and half-suspected horrors, than actual shame. How could he ever show himself to Chris in that mortuary garb? Romance could confront hardships without a murmur; meet them bravely; sustain itself under every adversity of fortune. But an undertaker! Love would shudder and fly. There was no room in Matt's paradise for an undertaker. An indescribable odium, or rather something grotesque

and grimly ridiculous was attached to such an occupation. No, he couldn't be an undertaker; he simply couldn't be an undertaker; personal dignity, a sense of humor, an invincible repugnance—all forbade.

But Mrs. Crowther was very persistent. The work was light, she said, and the salary so large. She had meant to offer sixty a month, but Matt's resistance induced her to increase it to a hundred. A hundred a month; how could he expect to get better in Manaswan? She would tell him how to do everything; he wasn't to be the least bit afraid of that; just do what he was told, and be very solemn and kind in his Prince Albert coat. It was a gentleman's business—that was what made it so hard to get assistants—that was why she had come to Matt. He had the right personality; Mr. C. had often remarked on it—the ideal personality. It was awful to have a jarring personality at a death-bed. People who would grudge a hundred and fifty dollars to a jarring personality wouldn't haggle over three hundred, and four horses, to one they could lean on in their trouble. They spread it about, and that helped the connection—and she had noticed that he didn't drink. Drink was the curse of the profession. People expected an undertaker to be on a higher plane. It was what she had said—a gentleman's business.

Matt listened with an increasing indecision. A hundred dollars a month was not lightly to be

thrown away. He might find it no easy matter to get half as much. He had canvassed Manaswan pretty thoroughly, and knew what a paucity of openings it presented. He had been meditating day's work on the docks—stacking lumber or unloading coal—by no means a pleasant or remunerative prospect. Besides, the mysterious enmity that everywhere surrounded him would find itself baffled by this little woman, whose need of him was so real, and whose position was so unassailable. Moreover, she would give him a two-years' contract, which he could break at a month's notice, while she was held rigidly for the full term. She conceded this not unwillingly, imparting the extra information that she had three thousand dollars in the savings bank, and owned the property in which the "parlors" were situated.

Matt questioned her with the assurance of a man who was loath to close the bargain; with an understanding sharpened by his recent trials. His unseen foes had shown how formidable they were, and here appeared an opportunity of resisting them successfully. Why not be an undertaker, with an ironclad, bomb-proof contract—who could smile at his persecutors? He would leave the final decision to Chris, and meanwhile hold tight to that hundred dollars a month.

But he would want the contract drawn up by a lawyer—no home-made affair, full of legal holes—but brass-bound, double-riveted, and securely bolted

and nailed down by an expert. The little widow had no objection; instead, she rippled with satisfaction at having gained her point; and called him a dear for consenting. Indeed she was so pleased, so overflowing, that Matt felt himself a villain for imposing such harsh conditions. But the White Cadets catastrophe with its attendant blackness and blueness had instilled caution. He remembered the Y. M. C. A. too, and the garage, and the speed with which his services in both had been dispensed with. He would protect himself this time from any such repetition, however exacting he might seem to be. Steel should meet steel—and Mr. Kay might gnash his teeth. From this aspect, becoming an undertaker was not without stimulation; he saw himself, not as a ministerial individual, brooding darkly over clamminess and decay, but as a fighter, hurling back those insidious forces that would destroy him.

Not caring to show his scratched face on the street, the lawyer was brought to him, and the contract forthwith was drawn up and signed. Mrs. Crowther, if anything, was more eager than he to have it settled; and afterward she came bicycling back, convoying a tailor, who took Matt's measure for a frockcoat and trousers of grayish black, and was pledged to a feverish hurry. The boarders, impressed but jocular, took great credit to themselves for achieving an arrangement they deemed so advantageous to both the high contracting parties. At supper there were congrat-

ulatory speeches; Mr. Goldstein opened bottled beer; Mr. Price, always humorous, foretold a tenderer partnership, and closed a peroration that caused immense merriment by asking: "Oh grave, where is thy sting? Oh, death, where is thy victory?" Good taste was the only thing lacking in an evening of general hilarity; but as no one noted the omission except Matt he did not consider it his part to be offended. Mrs. Crowther certainly laughed as gaily as the rest, and though she colored at some of the allusions, it was not in reprobation.

Behold Matt a week later a full-fledged undertaker, with a wide band of crape around his silk hat and in mourning for all humanity. Manaswan was one of those deceptive little places that was a great deal bigger than it looked, and this was borne in on Matt by the press of business. People died with astonishing freedom; the dead-wagon was seldom idle; the daily funeral became almost as much a matter of course as any other daily function. He rehearsed pall-bearers; could rattle off the price of caskets with deep-toned fluency; knew all about death-certificates, the use of ice, the graduated perishability of human clay, and how stiff and stark it looked in cold storage. There was indeed a dreadful interest in the work. It carried him into many strange houses, and brought him in contact with many strange people. He moved amid grief, sometimes affected, sometimes so real that it overwhelmed him.

Incidentally he was very successful. Awkward secrets had sometimes to be told, and discreetly understood. There were night funerals as well as others, and worthy people to be shielded from public and evil curiosity—interments by lantern-light, and in graves that might never bear a headstone. He was shocked at the intolerable expense, especially in the case of the humbler people, and those least able to afford it. Poor widows, with nothing above their heads but a mortgaged roof, had to be persuaded against ordering rosewood coffins with solid silver handles and name-plates. The bereaved on the whole were so helpless and so easily preyed on; they met imposition half-way, and in their pious folly encouraged it. It may not have been quite loyal to Mrs. Crowther, but Matt would not let some of his clients be victimized, even by themselves—suggesting economy and cotton-velvet and stained pine when a word the other way would have quadrupled their bill. Not that they were always like that, however. One keen Yankee showed him bids from the Pritchard Undertaking Company and the Necropolis Mortuary Parlors, saying: "If you can cut under them, go ahead!"

Their horses, by an arrangement with the Fashion Stables, were all "jobbed"; that is to say, they did not belong to Mrs. Crowther, who paid a monthly hire for them and owned merely the hearse and the dead-wagon. Their two men were almost as much "jobbed" as the horses, being paid by the

hour when on duty; one was the janitor of the Masonic Temple and the other a nondescript creature, who could usually be found fishing off the end of the wharf. When he was not fishing off the end of the wharf you could then be positive that he was leaning against the bar of the Good Fellows' Grotto. He wabbled between the two, more often than not with a pail of minnows.

Mrs. Crowther remained on in her solitary apartment above the "parlors," refusing, with a mild obstinacy, to move altogether to Mrs. Sattane's. Matt fell heir to Mr. Crowther's bicycle, and accompanied his employer to and fro for their meals. She was a self-possessed little person, and most capable and quiet, posting her books every Saturday, and striking a weekly balance in red ink. It was invariably on the right side, for the business was very profitable—more profitable than any one save Matt had any conception of.

This was a period of great depression for Matt. No convict ever hated stripes more than he hated the livery of that distasteful occupation. The word undertaker ground into his soul. He understood now why it was so largely an hereditary caste; one had to be fortified by an undertaker-descent; one needed, like Mrs. Crowther, to have played peek-a-boo among the coffins, and lisped one's lessons at a paternal, undertaking knee. To become at one bound death's twin brother was to outrage every susceptibility. Could Chris stoop to so igno-

minious a husband? Would it not make her hot with shame? An undertaker! Yet she might see it differently; women were so brave where their affection was at stake; and in a certain sense he had succeeded beyond their wildest hopes. A couple could make out comfortably enough in Manaswan on a hundred dollars a month; could be warm and snug and happy on a hundred dollars a month. Why then should he be so unutterably wretched?

Chris was growing very far away; was receding in the void with an ocean of heartaches and silence constantly widening between them. There were occasions when Matt could not bear to think of her at all, and felt himself forgotten; when it was of the smallest moment whether he were an undertaker at all in the comparison of that more terrible disaster. She would never come back; she would never write again; some day he would hear that she was married. Her willingness to come to him seemed incredible in the retrospect. It was a girl's ephemeral fancy, as filmy as a bubble, and destined to vanish at a breath. It was not a world where such things happened; lovely princesses no longer condescended to—cowherds, or remained true to lowly lovers through thick and thin; they chose men as desirable as themselves, who could give as much as they received. Money, family, social position—what a triple-barred Port Arthur for one little Japanese to scale! The little Japanese was excessively depressed.

He regarded those towering battlements, and then hung his dispirited head.

Before long he was spared any further bitter self-communion as to the business he was engaged in, and had no reason again to weigh his hundred dollars against his craped hat and that seat on the hearse. One day, returning with what had once been a grocer before apoplexy and fate had combined to strike him down, Matt found the "parlors" shut. After much knocking, none of which served to rouse Mrs. Crowther within, Matt scrambled to the second story by means of a gutter-pipe, and invaded the apartment. Ordinarily so neat, it presented a sight of the utmost confusion, as though thieves had ransacked it from end to end. Clothes were heaped on the floor; boots, odds and ends of women's finery, torn-up letters and old magazines —all the litter that attends a hurried packing and a precipitate departure. Mrs. Crowther had gone, and with her the three trunks containing shrouds and household linen that used to block the little hall.

He galloped off to Mrs. Sattane's—dead grocer and all—hoping for some explanation, some enlightenment. But the landlady was as perplexed as he, and could tell him nothing; nor was there more to be gleaned from the Fashion Stables, which were thrown into a flutter and convinced that the poor lady had met foul play. Mr. Merrick, the proprietor, followed the dead-wagon at a run as it tore

back to the "parlors," with Matt now thoroughly alarmed. A man was in the act of unlocking the front doors as the former arrived, and he vouchsafed the extraordinary information that the property had been sold to Mr. Farelly.

"But where's Mrs. Crowther?" demanded Matt.

"How the hell do I know?" returned the man, who was a surly person of the bailiff species. "I am here to take possession for Mr. Farelly, who has bought out the premises, lock, stock and barrel."

Failing to get any satisfaction Matt called up the money-lender over the telephone.

"Who's that you say?"

"I am Mr. Broughton—"

"Vell, what do you want?"

"I am Mrs. Crowther's assistant."

"Mrs. Crowther, the lady undertaker?"

"Yes, yes."

"She has given up business. Did she not acquaint you with that?"

"Then it is true you've bought the place?"

"Certainly, I buy it, and the two carriages also, and four sets of harness—everything."

"Where can I find her?"

"Why, ain't she there?"

"You know she isn't, Mr. Farelly. Where is she?"

"My dear young man, you astonish me. I do not keep the lady in my pocket. She sell me the prop-

erty in a big hurry, and I buy it in a big hurry—and that's all I can tell you."

"Did she say she was leaving Manaswan?"

"She never say anything."

"But you must have some address—some way of reaching her?"

"Vell, I took it she was at the boarding-house on Jefferson Avenue; though what for should I reach her? The title was searched, and I have her receipt for the money. You will excuse me if I ask you to ring off."

"Hold on, please; hold on a moment."

"Vell, what more?"

"I have a body in the dead-wagon, and all arrangements were made to lay it out in the mortuary, and have the funeral take place from here the day after to-morrow."

"You mean you have a dead person?"

"Yes, right here in the dead-wagon."

"Vell, don't you put him in my premises, or I will sue you for trespass, and send an officer to throw him out."

"But, good God, man, what am I to do with it?"

"That's your lookout."

"See here, Mr. Farelly, I'm tired of this! If you've bought the business, you have taken over the liabilities as well; and if you won't assume any responsibility I'll drive round to your office and leave the coffin in your doorway."

"Oh, *mein Gott,* no, no!"

"Those people deserve proper consideration, and you've got to show it to them."

"But in my office—! No, I forbid it."

"You send word at once to the Pritchard Undertaking Company to take charge, and at the price I fixed, and if you haven't by the time I get there, I'll drive to your place and leave the coffin on the floor."

"Oh, my dear young man, I will do it precisely as you request."

"And I won't have Mrs. Cowles charged a cent over eighty dollars. If the Pritchards make any difference, you must pay it."

"I will, I will."

"And state it in writing."

"Yes, in writing. Most faithfully will I perform it, if only you will keep your dead man away from my office!"

Of Mrs. Crowther nothing was ever seen again, though there was a rumor that could not be confirmed, that her name had appeared on the passenger list of an out-going Boston liner. Consultation with a lawyer gave no hope of holding Farelly accountable for her breach of contract. Matt could not recover either his wages or the amount he had spent on clothes. The property was securely in the money-lender's possession, and could not be attached. The bank, under the threat of an injunction, opened its books, and proved that Mrs. Crowther had withdrawn her deposit in notes on the day before she had

disappeared; her outstanding accounts had either been settled at a discount, or sold to a collection-agency. There was as little to distrain upon as though she were the Arab who silently folded his tent. Sand, metaphorically speaking, was all that remained. While every one wondered and speculated and racked their bewildered heads, Matt alone said nothing. For him there was a writing on the wall, invisible to the others, and it was in three letters as bright as flame: K-A-Y.

CHAPTER XVII

CHRISTINE REAPPEARS

GETTING a job on the water-front was as easy as he had anticipated; but what he had not reckoned on was the overmastering, crushing fatigue that made it impossible to keep it. A man unaccustomed to severe and prolonged manual labor has little chance on the docks. Swollen muscles seared his back like fire; the skin came off his hands till they were gummy with blood and dirt; to stoop became a torture, and his feet, unused to the heavy weights they were forced to carry, caused him the most poignant distress. One may be a good all-round athlete and in excellent physical condition, and yet give out like a woman when it comes to unloading bricks all day, or holding up your end of three-inch planks for hours at a stretch.

Matt's opinion of the social fabric underwent a revolution. He is still asking himself why those who toil the hardest should be the worst paid. Everything is piled on the laborer; he bears the world on his straining shoulders; he is the Man Friday of civilization, while Crusoe, nicely got up in goatskins and jingling his money, unceasingly berates him as the laziest nigger under the sun, and

grudges him the pittance that keeps body and soul together.

Matt, working one day and often recuperating for two, exerted every nerve to find less killing employment. Mr. Doty, who might have helped him, was absent at a Chautauqua conference; Matt had no one to lean on save Providence and himself. There were openings here and there for skilled men, but none seemingly for such as he. He was unpleasantly conscious, too, that he had lost caste; he was under some strange ban; people froze at his approach and were glad to see him leave. Goldstein confided to him that "there was a lot of gossip running around the place" and that "somebody seems to have it in for you, old man, and have it in good and hard!" Nothing could induce the bookkeeper to be more specific. "Oh, what's the use?" he said, shying off the subject. "The town's got a down on you—and let it go at that!"

One of the few that did not have "a down on him" was Sullivan, the boss stevedore. Sullivan was a burly, bullying giant of a man, whose original aversion had turned into a genuine liking, and to whom Matt was indebted for many kindnesses. Matt had been quickly promoted from "Hi, you there," to "Sonny," which represented the two poles of boss-stevedore consideration. As "Hi, you there," Matt had been singled out for anything specially disagreeable; as "Sonny" he was, comparatively speaking, a pampered pet. His efforts to bet-

ter himself, as the phrase goes in that class, were sympathetically followed by Mr. Sullivan, who was also "keeping his eye open" in the young fellow's interest. It opened—very ineffectually as it turned out—on the municipal watering cart; on a secretary's job down at Fowler and Beale's; on a position as chucker-out at the Oriental Café. One day Sullivan beamingly announced a new possibility.

"A fellow has been down here from the Mountain View quarry," he said. "They are opening it up again, and expect to put in a shift of four hundred Hunks. He was a nice-appearing fellow, with a rubber-tired buggy and a diamond pin, wanting me to figure on loading sandstone by the cubic yard, and would I make a contract if I were guaranteed a monthly minimum. One thing led to another, and then I put in a good word for you as gang foreman or in the office, and he wrote down your name very pleased on his cuff. You're to drive out on Sunday morning and talk it over, though he said he wouldn't promise nothing positive till he saw you."

This was cheering indeed, and gave Matt renewed hope at a moment when it was nigh gone. As it happened, he remembered the deserted quarry very well, having passed it in the Jonesmobile in the course of his random travels. It was a desolate, out-of-the-way place about sixteen miles from Manaswan, with long wooden shanties in the last stage of dilapidation, and rusting tramway tracks leading to rusting chutes. It had stuck in his memory as dis-

malness personified, and he recalled having given shout after shout to hear his voice reëcho from the steep, gashed hillside.

But a job was a job, and four hundred Hungarians were likely to lighten the somber picture and restore a teeming and busy life to a spot that had lain undisturbed for twenty or more years. Its distance from Manaswan was in itself a recommendation, and might make it impossible for those unseen enemies to hound him so far. It was a Boston enterprise, representing Boston capital and Boston initiative, and its only connection with Manaswan was by way of an outlet for the dressed stone. The more Matt considered it, the better he was pleased, and he thanked Sullivan with all his heart.

Sunday, however, was a couple of days away, and a man can do much reflecting in two days, even if they be spent in the hold of a scow-schooner, passing bricks. The Mountain View quarry, thus reviewed, was not without some disturbing features. Neither Price nor Goldstein, for instance, had heard of its reopening, and this was the more curious as both were in situations where such news would be seized on with avidity. The local newspaper was dumb, and Hunter Hoyt said that the "boys" did not believe it was true. These facts, in addition to Matt's growing doubts, counseled some thinking before leaping. The old quarry had a bad name; there was a legend of a murder having been committed there; its isolation fretted Matt with vague

misgivings. He determined at last to beg Daggancourt to accompany him, and this gradually included—in his mind—a car, the two mechanics, and a shotgun for each. Victor, met at a stealthy rendezvous under the cemetery bridge, acceded to the plan with his usual good-nature. He was pleased at the prospect of a picnic and volunteered to provide the auto, the mechanics and the guns, as well as cold ham and bread and butter—though he was frankly skeptical as to the adventure being anything but a pleasant jaunt.

"Those old quarries are opening up all over the country," he said. "What galls me is that I didn't light out and risk a few hundreds myself. But there it was right under our noses, and to be had for a song, while it was left to Boston folks to see it was a good thing and grab it."

"All the same I don't care to go out there alone," objected Matt. "If they are on the square it will look natural enough for us to have brought our guns with the idea of picking up some rabbits. If they aren't—well, they won't care to meddle with four of us. But don't tell Mack or Louey that it's anything except a picnic in the woods."

Victor laughed.

"No, *sir,*" he declared emphatically. "The best way to make a dog fight is to crowd him into it, and it's no different with a man. But Lord bless you, Marse' Broughton, it ain't in sense or reason to expect any trouble."

"I can't help it, Victor; I'm nervous."

"What could anybody want to hurt you for?"

"Didn't Farelly get me out of the garage? Didn't he have a lot to do with Mrs. Crowther's disappearance?"

"Coincidences, maybe."

"Coincidences? And what of the Y. M. C. A. and the White Cadets? As soon as I get something and am sure of it and comfortable—it's out you go, Mr. Man."

"It's mighty queer, Marse' Broughton. I'll allow it's mighty queer."

"And how do I know this isn't a trap?"

"Marse' Broughton?"

"Yes, Victor."

"We'll load up these guns with buckshot."

"But Mack and Louey will ask why?"

"That's easy—say it's for bear."

"Bear? Who ever heard of a bear in this country?"

"Mack and Louey will before I'm much older. A small, black one—if I made it too big they mightn't come."

"You'd better reduce it to a cub for Mack."

"Then he might scare at a mother-bear being around somewhere! No, I'll give them just the kind of bear that four of us could easily get away with, and carry home on the tail-rack."

"And, Victor?"

"Sir?"

"If it came to a scrimmage, you would stand up to it, wouldn't you?"

"Shoulder to shoulder, Marse' Broughton—never you doubt that."

"And I don't think you had better pick me up in town. Farelly mustn't see that we are friendly."

"That's right."

"Suppose I wait for you at the cross-roads beyond the dairy."

"Van Wyck's dairy?"

"Yes, Van Wyck's."

"What time?"

"Oh, suit yourself."

"Ten o'clock?"

"Yes, ten o'clock goes."

"Then that's settled? Ten o'clock to-morrow morning?"

"At the cross-roads."

"Yes, at the cross-roads."

"And the guns? Will you have any bother to get them?"

"Not a bit—and all twelves, so that the same cartridges will fit. The gunsmith will rent them to anybody he trusts. And if it is too late for ham, may we make it chops and hard-boiled eggs?"

"Oh, yes, anything."

"And we'll take the old tow-wagon. How's the road over there, Marse' Broughton?"

"Bad! Stick in an ax, for there is corduroy here and there, and some of it has rotted."

"Need chains?"

"It's always good to have them."

"You know what I think, Marse' Broughton?"

"No, what?"

"That we'll get out there, armed to the teeth, and find Hunkyville running full blast, and a superintendent in a nice white-painted cottage, smoking a cigar."

"Very likely."

"Why, it ain't in reason that it will be anything else. You've had a run of bad luck, and it has flustered you. We'll skin home with a tidy job all ready for you to go to on Monday, and the biggest kind of a laugh at the fuss we worked ourselves into."

"I dare say you're right."

"I'd better get back now, and breed that bear! Can't I give you a lift?"

"Too dangerous, Victor—we mustn't be seen together—but thanks all the same."

"Nothing makes me happier than doing something for you, and that's God's truth. Good night, Marse' Broughton, and I only wish it was more."

They shook hands and separated, and Matt, slowly returning to Mrs. Sattane's on foot, called down an unspoken blessing on the old darky's head. Such unquestioning and humble devotion touched him to the quick, and to have inspired it raised him in his own esteem.

The battered old tow-wagon, true to time, came

whirling up in a cloud of dust, honking joyfully. Daggancourt was at the wheel; Mack and Louey in the tonneau, and there was about all three an appearance of festivity that accorded with the bright spring morning. The two mechanics, one Scotch and the other French, were in uproarious spirits, greeting Matt noisily, and showing him, with great gusto, the guns and packages at their feet. Matt jumped up beside Victor, and with a nudge of his leg which the other answered with a wink, asked for the latest bulletin of the bear. Since overnight it had become a very real bear, reported by woodchoppers, and confirmed by an imaginary individual named Sam Bacon. The mechanics were eager for the fray, and Louey had equipped himself with a hunting-knife for the express purpose of skinning the bear. Victor, giggling at the wheel, contributed further Sam Bacon particulars, and altogether they were very jolly, indeed.

Spinning blithely along, waving their hats at every one they passed, they at length swung off the main road and into the hills. The country hereabouts was sparsely settled; instead of comfortable farm-houses and barns, the rare dwellings shrank to mere cabins, and wretched patches gave place to fields. Soon they were beyond all cultivation, in a region of woods and scrub, with sandy hollows in which they sank to the rims. Matt reached over and secured a gun, gladder than ever he had not come alone. This prompted Mack and Louey to do the

same, and it was in this warlike manner that they reached the quarry.

It was as deserted as Matt had remembered it; not a sound broke the silence; and the tumble-down buildings, with their broken windows, showed no sign of occupancy. Matt looked at Victor, and Victor stared back. Where were the Boston people? Where were the four hundred Hungarians? It was a tomb of abandoned endeavor, crumbling and decaying beneath the scarred mountain. The spell of the bear was upon the two mechanics; the spell of something yet more mysterious and intimidating was upon Matt and the mulatto. They turned off the engine, descended, and advanced, guns in hand, close together and alert, a finger on every trigger. For a dozen minutes they prowled about, searching the shanties in turn; climbing up rocky buttresses; dislodging bats in cavernous workings, and skirting pools of muddy yellow water.

All of a sudden Mack, more adventuresome than the rest, came running toward them in unmistakable agitation.

"Let's get out of here," he gasped, displaying a piece of new black cloth in his hand. "Look at that, boys, look at that!"

Except for its newness, which was singular in a spot so wholly deserted, Matt saw nothing to stare at in the black cloth, which was smaller than a napkin, and of some cheap, cotton material, slit in several places.

Victor and Louey were equally surprised at the Scotchman's terror, and eyed him and his discovery with surprise.

"You gawks," cried Mack, beside himself, "don't you see it's a mask?"

Laying his gun on the ground he tremblingly set the thing to his face, and glowered at them through the apertures. Instantly he was transformed into a bandit, and a shiver passed through his companions. It was but a trifling bit of cloth, yet it made their hearts beat like sledge-hammers. It was the symbol of murder, of dark and violent deeds, of blood and outrage. To stumble across it here was to people the quarry with lurking desperadoes; they examined it whisperingly, and cast apprehensive looks over their shoulders. It might have been made an hour before; the edges were sharp from the scissors; neither dew nor sun had impaired the crispness of the fabric.

"Let's get out of here," repeated Mack. "I've had all the bear I want."

Matt and Victor stayed together, retiring in good order, but the others fled for the car like rabbits.

"It's a pretty good thing you came with me," said Matt. "Victor, that's what I'd call a close shave."

"I can't make head or tail of it, Marse' Broughton."

"But it is a mask, isn't it?"

"Sure it is a mask."

"And wasn't I told to apply here for a job?"

"Perhaps it was a joke."

"Who would go to all that trouble? I tell you, Victor, that mask was dropped by one of a party who moved back before us and are hiding somewhere in the scrub this very minute. And it was a party that was expecting *me!*"

"And were scared at seeing four of us with guns?"

"Precisely."

"And the whole talk of starting up the quarry again was just moonshine?"

"Yes, to inveigle me here."

Daggancourt whistled.

"I believe it was," he said solemnly. "It can't have been anything else. It just can't have been anything else."

They increased their pace, urged to hurry by Mack and Louey, who had cranked up the car and were calling frantically. The two mechanics were panic-stricken, and in a frenzy to be off; and as Matt and Daggancourt took their seats in front, they, too, caught the contagion, and were as madly eager as the others. The engine roared to the advancing levers; the low-gear slipped swiftly into mesh, and with a grind and a jump the sturdy old car tore round, and re-took the road it had come. Corduroy, sand, rocks or tree-roots—nothing deterred Victor, who, crouched over the wheel, and bracing himself against it, flung the car forward at a break-neck speed, never relaxing until the open

country was reached. Nor even here would he consent to stop and camp. Six miles was still too close to the quarry. The vote, on its being put, was three to one to continue to the outskirts of Manaswan, and picnic on the bank of the river.

Choosing a shady place in some willows beside the highway, they ran in the car and unpacked their lunch. But they were too upset to eat, so smoked instead, and reclined on the grass, debating the extraordinary discovery of the mask, and wondering whether or not they should inform the police. Matt joined in but little, except to negative the suggestion, and this was more to prevent his silence causing remark. He was very thoughtful and moody; he felt for the first time his own powerlessness; he was surrounded by an implacable enmity that struck at him in the dark, and against which he had no weapons. What was he to do? What was to become of him? Had he gone alone to the quarry that morning he shuddered at the fate that might have been in store for him. He saw the body of a man floating in one of those turbid pools, and the man was himself. It shook his nerve. He had to admit he was frightened.

He looked up as he heard the sound of horses' hoofs growing nearer at a trot; sprang up, as Mack, whose position gave him a view of the road, said something about a young lady on horseback. It was a young lady indeed! It was Chris, riding beside her father, and approaching briskly!

She saw him as quickly as he saw her, and at that

recognition, so unexpected and sudden that it seemed to pierce his heart, he took a step out, and raised his hat. All that happened after was like a dream; it had the bewildering quality of his first fight—the same incoherence and mistiness. He found himself holding her bridle—talking and listening with breathless animation. She had not been able to stay away longer; she loved him, and would say it before the world, promise or no promise; it had been unbearable, and she was twenty-three and her own mistress, and, oh, had he succeeded in what they had planned? No, he had not; it was a bitter confession, but he had not; they had got him out of one thing after another; had forced him to his knees; he had been persecuted and hunted till he was well nigh crazy. Over all, was another voice, stridently crying: "Let go my daughter's horse, sir! Do you hear, sir, let go my daughter's horse! Let go my daughter's horse!" a voice vibrating with passion and yet immeasurably distant and as unconsidered as the drone of a wasp.

Suddenly there was a flash of a whip and a stinging blow cut across Matt's face; another flash; a scream; and he had wrenched the whip from a wrinkled old hand and was about to lash out with it himself on that convulsed and raging figure. To his dying day he was thankful he threw it from him instead, dizzily refraining as he realized it was Chris' father and that he must not strike an old man.

But he was furious, nevertheless; two livid stripes screamed for vengeance; his voice came in sobbing bursts as he clung to the general's horse and told him that his action was shameful; that no one calling himself a gentleman could insult one who—! The horse reared and plunged as the general's spurs dug into its flanks; the old man was trying to ride him down. It was then that Matt had a vision of Daggancourt leveling a gun at Marshall. Every shred of civilization seemed to have dropped from the mulatto; all the savage in him was roused to frenzy; his bloodshot eyes were taking sight; his yellow-black finger was drawing back the trigger; with murderous deliberation he was awaiting his chance to fire.

It was Louey who averted a tragedy; he leaped at Daggancourt and threw up the gun; it exploded harmlessly in the air with an ear-shattering detonation. As it did so, the horses took fright and bolted, hurling Matt to the ground, from which he looked after them, on one elbow, oblivious of everything but Chris' safety. But she was as good a rider as her father and as spirited as her own thoroughbred; she was keeping her seat in that headlong gallop, and, leaning back like a little jockey, was jerking manfully at the curb. But nothing could have checked those horses; they were uncontrollable in their terror; straining neck and neck they diminished and disappeared, leaving Matt sick with fear.

He was assisted to his feet and supported to the

willows, where they laid him down and examined him. But he was not seriously hurt; no bones were broken; he was only bruised and sore, and the descending steel had fortunately glanced instead of crushing him. Horses will not step on a man if they can avoid it.

Daggancourt wore the air of a whipped dog; was mumbling and explanatory; had never meant to shoot; "honest to God" he had never meant to shoot. He was so cringing and conscience-stricken that Matt could not reproach him. He accepted his hand instead, and told him to shut up. "Let's get to town," he added, beset by a grinding anxiety. "I —I have to know if anything has happened to Miss Marshall."

In a fever of impatience, and staggering like a drunkard, he drove them into the automobile and commanded Victor to make haste.

"Hurry, hurry, hurry," he cried, in an exasperation of suspense. "The car's good for a mile a minute, and, by God, she has to do it!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ELOPEMENT

THERE was no news of the runaways till they reached Main Street; it was in a turmoil, and knots of people were gathered in front of the shops, talking excitedly. A passer-by informed them that there had nearly been a bad accident. "A man and a girl on horseback, going like the wind, and my! if there wasn't a scurry to clear the way. Been going yet if a hay wagon hadn't pulled square acrost and brought them up all standing."

"But nobody hurt?" asked Matt, full of dread.

"Naw! But they were lathered to beat the band, and it was a wonder nobody was killed. The old gentleman, he give the driver a dollar; patted his horse a bit, and then went on like nothing had happened."

"And the young lady?"

"Oh, she went along, too, though her hair was down her back and she looked ready to drop."

Matt breathed a sigh of relief; and after verifying the report from another eye-witness, begged the mulatto to take him home. He was glad to creep in and hide himself in his room. Terribly tired, terribly humiliated, the first thing he did was to gaze at

his face in the glass. But no trace remained of the whip, except a slight discoloration on the forehead. Here was another cause for thankfulness, for he dreaded lest he might be marked for days and be condemned to an ignominious seclusion.

He spent the afternoon in bed, unspeakably wretched, and at an utter loss to know what to do. Chris was further from him now than she had been in Washington; to meet her again would be almost impossible; to write was to incur the risk, almost the certainty of his letter being intercepted;—and what could he say if he did write? Only that he had failed, and he had already told her that. There was no way out; no solution; he could see nothing but a deep-water ship and an eternal farewell.

After supper that night he was told there was a lady outside in a buggy asking for him. He ran out bareheaded, not daring to think it was Chris, yet unable to conceive how it could be any one else. He was in a fever of expectation. If not Chris, could it possibly be Mrs. Crowther? What other women could be seeking him? But it was neither. There was a glimmer of spectacles, and he looked up at a thin, sallow countenance that reminded him of Miss Gibbs,—a middle-aged woman, plainly and poorly dressed, similarly faded, and with the same aspect of quiet decision.

She eyed him searchingly, and begged to know if he were Mr. Broughton. On his replying that he was she handed him a note. He read it by the light

of the lantern on the dash, deciphering the penciled writing with difficulty.

"My Darling:

"I am sending you this by my Swiss maid, Flexner, *whom don't trust too much.* She will tell you what I have planned, for I am so used up, so distracted that I can not write it, though I have tried twice. I am at the end of my courage and everything, and if we don't snatch at our happiness now we shall lose it for ever. It was wicked of him to strike you. Wicked, wicked, wicked! Let Flexner do all the talking till you understand. Don't think she is devoted, it's because I promised her 2,000 dols, and that is a fortune in her country, where I suppose she will settle down and yodel for the rest of her days. She *is very sharp, so be cautious.* Oh, if I could only talk to you myself, but I love you, and she will show you how much. Adieu.

"Chris."

"P. S. When I shall have paid her the $100 she insists on in advance I shall have eighty-two dollars left."

Matt pondered a moment, and then inquired: "You are Flexner?"

"Yes, sir."

"Will you please give me your message?"

The woman hesitated; moved in her seat; and then replied in a low voice: "Had we not better move away from the gate—people may see us here?"

Matt assented, and walked beside the buggy as it was slowly driven beyond Mrs. Sattane's, stopping opposite a vacant lot. He kept reminding himself that this Flexner was "very sharp"; also that "she was not to be trusted too much." He was stirred and uneasy and in a state of suppressed excitement. Something was on foot; something vital and peremptory; he was devoured to learn what it was.

"My young lady wishes to do a very foolish thing," said Flexner with a disapproving pursing of her mouth. "Insists on it like the spoiled child she is. In my country we would lock her in a room and send for the pastor to lecture her, or whip—oh, yes, whip. She wants you to run away with her to-morrow morning."

"Run away with her!"

"She says you are to get a carriage, or better, an automobile, and pick her up to-morrow morning at four o'clock at the Fair Oaks' entrance. Previously, I shall have packed a small portmanteau and placed it outside the house, and all next day I will inform her father that she is ill and can not be disturbed. By this means you reach Middleborough without trouble, and get married, and then take the train to New York. From New York you will travel to that city—that city where you were cheated of your ring—"

("San Francisco," said Matt to himself.)

"And there you stay, no matter how poor, how starving, till the opportunity arrives to go to that

place where you have a friend—a very rich, queer man—whom once you served—and who will take you back in employment."

("John Mort," said Matt to himself.)

"She says it must be now, or not at all, for she can not be so brave twice; she says desperate people have to take desperate chances; she asks you to answer yes or no."

Matt made a hasty calculation; he had almost a hundred dollars; this, with Chris' eighty-two, would easily get them to California, with something to spare. Answer? It was yes, of course, a thousand times yes, though his temper rose at Swiss rapacity.

"You are to be paid two thousand dollars for helping us?" he protested. "Isn't that a very great deal?"

Flexner could not admit that it was, betraying animation for the first time. Was she not losing an excellent position? Was she not going against her conscience? What would be the value of that promissory note were Mees to die before she came into her property? Flexner considered two thousand dollars at six per cent. compound interest a most moderate remuneration. Matt, whose real purpose was to save that hundred dollars in money—a hundred dollars that might be of priceless importance to him and Chris in the extremity of their fortunes, objected and haggled with a persistence very unbecoming in a young Lochinvar.

But the inflexible Swiss would not abate a penny

of her demands. A hundred dollars in cash, and nineteen hundred in a promissory note, at six per cent., due in three years, was the price of an inflexible Swiss. She was losing an excellent position; Mees might die; her conscience, etc., etc.—a bargain was a bargain. Attacked on the side of sentiment, Flexner confronted him with her own little romance. She meant to return to Zurich and marry a faithful cuckoo-clock maker. That was what made her so blind to duty and conscience. The sallow, middle-aged creature had her Carl; Mr. Broughton must not think he was the only one that loved. The Swiss, too, had hearts, and every week Carl wrote and asked her how much money she had saved up. She would earn her reward, never fear, and then misdirect the pursuit to Bridgeport; she would manage everything with secrecy; she would assure them of a whole day's start. The real question was—yes or no?

Matt longed to write a note to Chris, but he was afraid of the attention it might attract in the boarding-house. The boarders were always so curious, so nosing, especially where he was concerned. Besides, he had to see Daggancourt and arrange for that flitting at dawn. He told Flexner that his answer was "Yes," and put into the word a warmth that he hoped she would carry to her mistress. She was to say that he had ninety-seven dollars, and would carry out his instructions implicitly; was also to say that she was the pluckiest girl in the

world, and that if it were a desperate chance he would promise that they would be desperately happy. It was like talking to cold veal, but all the same he talked and talked—and cold veal listened, mentally computing nineteen hundred dollars for three years at six per cent.

She drove off, leaving Matt in a whirl. Chris and he were to run away! Chris and he were to be married at Middleborough! His pulses throbbed; he could scarcely grasp it; he could scarcely believe it! How superbly reckless of her! How incredible! How unworthy he was of such an amazing sacrifice! Yet it was the only way out, mad as it was. She had appreciated that boldly when he had been despairing. Could they but hold their own in San Francisco the opportunity would surely present itself of reaching the South Pacific. Once into Tahiti, Samoa, Raratonga—anywhere in the Islands—the rest would be comparatively easy.

One was readily trusted in the South Pacific; he could charter a vessel and pledge John Mort's credit without the least danger to the latter. And with what a welcome he would be received—he and Chris! Here was the one spot on earth where he was assured of welcome. Moreover, he would return with the glory of having baffled Mort's mysterious enemies, of having successfully resisted and defied them. Mort would appreciate that. Yes, everything pointed to Lotoalofa.

He had some trouble in finding Daggancourt,

whom he finally ran down in a wood-shed behind Mrs. O'Brien's boarding-house. Mrs. O'Brien drew the color-line more strictly than Mrs. Sattane; hence the wood-shed, and the general effect of shipwreck-and-desert-island in which poor Victor appeared as the only survivor. He was sitting on a soap-box, reading beside a table he had constructed of some old lumber, and presented a forlorn picture of what human prejudice could accomplish. A musty mattress lay in one corner; his toilet articles were ranged along a ledge of the wall; a broken plate of meat, and a chipped, yellow bowl showed his untasted supper. He started violently as Matt pushed open the door and entered.

"Oh, Lord, I took you for the constable," he said, greeting Matt in surprise and laughing constrainedly. "I thought the old gentleman had sworn out a warrant for my raising a gun to him."

"Don't you worry about that," returned Matt. "He will have something more important to bother about pretty soon. Victor, I'm in an awfully tight place, and you will have to help me out again."

"I'm always ready to do that, Marse' Broughton; all I need is to be told how, you know."

"Victor, I'm going away."

"Going away, Marse' Broughton? Not going away for good?"

The darky extended his hands appealingly.

"I wouldn't do it," he added, as though to a child. "What's the sense of doing that?"

"I want you to have the tow-wagon in front of the garage at half-past three o'clock this morning—full up—gas, oil and water. Wait till I come, and then we'll go on to Fair Oaks—just you and me, mind—no one else. At the big gate we shall pick up a young lady and go on to Middleborough, where the young lady and I will be married, and then take the first train for New York."

Victor caught his breath.

"It ain't Miss Marshall you mean?"

"Yes, it's Miss Marshall."

There was an inherent strain of good breeding in Daggancourt. He put no inquisitive questions; he did not try to force Matt's confidence; he waited, hoping to receive it, and then, detecting Matt's reluctance, hastened to place him at his ease.

"So that's how it is," he exclaimed genially. "Well, well, I'm sure I do congratulate you, and I'm just tickled to death, Marse' Broughton, just tickled to death! Half-past three o'clock, you say?"

"Oh, Victor, what a good chap you are; I can never thank you enough; yes, half-past three—and, of course, not a whisper to anybody."

"You leave it to me, sir."

"And for God's sake, don't oversleep."

"It wouldn't be me if I did; if there's any slip up it won't be my fault; I'll be there all right."

"Good night, then; I'll be getting along back."

"Have you told any one there—at Mrs. Sattane's?"

"Not a soul."

Daggancourt's pleasure at this answer was undisguised.

"They ain't fit to be trusted," he said, his face wrinkling with satisfaction. "My, won't they stare to-morrow!"

"Excuse my hurrying, Victor; I'm dead beat."

"Good night, Marse' Broughton, I know you must be."

"Good night."

At half-past three they met like conspirators in the darkness. Matt was carrying his suit-case, into which he had crammed the better part of his belongings, though he had been forced to leave his frock-coat and evening clothes, together with a great deal more that he was less able to spare. But it was not a moment for considerations of wardrobe; what were a few shirts and a swallow-tail to a young Lochinvar?

He was a very nervous, fidgety Lochinvar, as he encircled his steed, otherwise the most disreputable-looking of automobiles, and planted a kick on each of the tires. But they were standing up like Trojans, and Victor, moreover, had lashed a couple of spare casings to the rear, as well as providing himself with some brand-new tubes. Yes, Victor had a jack; yes, Victor had borrowed a better pump from the big Pierce; yes, tire-irons, plugs, extra lugs and wet cells—Victor vouched for them all.

Nothing remained except to put a match to the headlights and turn her over.

She caught the spark at the first turn, and away they went, traversing the silent streets, and rumbling over the bridges at a lively pace. Once beyond the town Victor let her have her head, and made the wind whistle past their ears as he laid her to it like a racer. Fences, woods and the winding road danced before the concentrated glare of the reflectors; on either side rose the night, walling them in as though they were plunging through a deep defile; the engine hummed with its rhythm of steel. Then the gates of Fair Oaks suddenly darted up; were caught and lost again as the brakes ground sullenly and the car shivered to a stop.

There was a sound of voices; of feet running; of muffled exclamations in the dark. A slight figure murmured pantingly: "Oh, Matt, is it you!" and clung to him. Another, with Swiss incisiveness and lugging a heavy portmanteau with both hands, wanted to know where it was to go, and failing an answer tumbled it into the tonneau. Matt followed, assisting Chris, and lifted her in with his strong arms. Not a word was said; the door snapped shut; Victor, peering behind, turned and threw in his clutch. In an instant they were speeding through the deep defile again, engulfed in the night.

Matt's recollection of his elopement was both strangely blurred and strangely vivid. He was tired to exhaustion, and so was Chris; nothing could keep

them long awake, not even the ecstasy of being together. Yet that dawn was the most imperishable memory of his life as he looked down at her, nestled beside him, with the heavy lashes fringing her cheeks. She opened her sleepy eyes and nestled closer—and closer still when he whispered it was their wedding-day.

They say responsibility gravitates to the shoulders fit to bear it. In this case the shoulders were Daggancourt's, and his was the directing spirit. He had charged himself with the whole business, and had thought out a plan of campaign in which the others were merely to do what they were bid. They did so meekly, bewildered and happy at this fresh instance of the first being last and the last first. There was an element of humor, besides, in resigning themselves to an elderly darky, who knew so much more about getting married than they did.

Victor's resourcefulness, indeed, was only comparable to that of a genie of the Arabian Nights. The favored prince and the lovely Circassian nodded on the magic carpet, or stole scared and whimsical glances at each other as Genie Daggancourt drew them through the air. In some unknown manner he acquired breakfast, and spread it for them in a secluded grassy garden, where afterward a caretaker lady appeared, in a flutter of concern and blue-flannel dressing-gown, and insisted on removing Chris to the shuttered house.

From this Chris emerged later, adorably fresh-

ened, and as she said—almost awake. She was very gay and tremulous, and talked a great deal, as though afraid to stop—as though if she stopped she would cry. Then Genie Daggancourt discreetly withdrew, and she did cry—sobbing, and holding to Matt. But it seemed she was not crying for herself, but for him, and because she loved him so much, and because they had only a hundred and seventy-nine dollars, and because she loved her father, too, and because— The list came to an abrupt end when Matt said that there was still time to take her back; on which she besought his forgiveness, declaring that she had not meant a word of it—except loving him, of course—and that girls always cried when they were very, very h-h-happy.

Victor reappeared, looking at his watch, and cutting short further repentance.

"Better get aboard again," he said. "The minister's waiting, and all we need is our ring and our license—and I'm calculating to run you over to Claremont and put you on the express there."

"Claremont?" asked Matt. "Why Claremont?"

"It's a small town about eight miles down the line," Victor returned. "It will bother them more to trace you from there than if you left from here."

"Good idea! Oh, Victor, what a treasure you are."

"Well, Marse' Broughton, don't the Scriptures say: What you do, do it with all your might, and, Well done, thou good and faithful servant?"

His eyes twinkled as he led the way to the car and shut the pair in the tonneau. After all, it was something to be a genie and serve a prince. Personal devotion was the keynote of Daggancourt's character. He belonged to the type that worked for their masters without pay after the war and guarded their women while it lasted. There is many a southern home that enshrines the memory of such as he—that "good nigger" and often a humble hero, of whom we hear too little in the acerbities of race hatred.

The ring was bought, the license obtained, and a benignant fossil recited the marriage ceremony in a stuffy parlor and made out a certificate that was not unlike a giant Christmas card—with angels blowing on heavenly horns and the Most High Himself not spared by the naïve artist. The fossil was called Snyder, the Reverend Ephraim Snyder, and though shaky and quavering, was not without a simple dignity. At the conclusion he warned Matt against drink and Chris against "frivolity and the love of fine raiment," and thus briefly condensing human frailty, blessed them both with unaffected sincerity. Victor slipped a ten-dollar note in his not unwilling hand, and they left the stuffy parlor —married.

It was quite impossible to believe it, in spite of the ring, and the warning, and the certificate, which was too stiff to fold, and had to be carried rolled up, like a sheet of music or sandpaper. It was hard to

shake off the conviction that somehow they had failed to get married; that anything so stupendous could be so easy. On the whole, they were very silent in their new state, attempting to realize it, and only dimly succeeding. Matt was much the more fearful, as well he might be, and learned again the unsuspected courage of women. Chris had no misgivings; no dread of the future—comforted the big baby when he said: "I hope I haven't been horribly selfish; I hope I haven't acted abominably." Already he was turning to her—leaning on her—finding fortitude and consolation in a dependence as sweet to him as it was to her.

At Claremont they caught the New York express, and Daggancourt, who had taken the tickets, hurried them through a Pullman to the compartment he had reserved. This was an extravagance for which they were unprepared, and Matt's face lengthened in spite of himself; but he could not be so ungracious as to scold the old darky, though such a dip into their slender purse was a serious matter. He owed Daggancourt as well for the license, and for the minister, and would have paid him before had he not been put off with one excuse or another. He now pulled out a handful of bills, a little vexed at Victor's dilatoriness.

"How do we stand, Victor?" he asked. "Two for the license; ten for Mr. What-dye-call-him, and, oh, yes—the ring—that's five more, seventeen—and the auto, I insist upon paying for that—and the

tickets. For heaven's sake, be quick about it, or they'll start the train."

"Marse' Broughton, you aren't as well fixed as you ought to be," said Daggancourt, "and—and so I think we'll just let it stand over, if you don't mind."

"Stand over? I should say not! Here, take thirty-five and call it square!"

"It can never be that between you and me, sir," returned Victor, with a droop of the lower lip that made him look the embodiment of guilt. "I'm powerful fond of you, Marse' Broughton, and—and it would be a great favor if you would just accept it —temporary. Like you might from a white man," he added stammeringly, "only temporary, till you sort of get settled, and—"

"I'll take it," Matt said brokenly, "and I won't pretend it isn't a gift, either. God knows, I need it, Victor, and I—I thank you."

It was as well for all three that the train began to move. Victor turned and ran, and the last they saw of him he was shuffling beside the track outside, waving his handkerchief. They waved back, saying farewell, as it were, to all their past life as well as to that shabby figure receding behind them. The new one seemed to date from the moment they found themselves alone together for the first time since dawn; as they looked at each other—that haggard, unshaven man, that pale girl, thus unflinchingly taking their fate into their own hands.

CHAPTER XIX

A FRIEND DROPS FROM HEAVEN

THE fare to Chicago by a two-day train was eighteen dollars apiece, which included a "free reclining-chair car." From Chicago to San Francisco it was thirty-three dollars more, with eight dollars extra for the tourist sleeper. In all, a hundred and ten dollars, which left them precisely sixty-nine dollars and twenty cents to pay for their meals and provide for them in San Francisco. But for Daggancourt's generosity they would have been forced to go hungry in order to hoard an even more meager sum.

They slept their bridal night, fully dressed, in the free reclining-chairs, which, however favorably regarded by the railway company, were wretched substitutes for beds. The car was crowded and hot; a stout gentleman gurgled and snored; an ailing child whimpered at intervals throughout the night. Matt awoke in the morning discouraged and not without a haunting compunction at seeing Chris in such a place and among such people.

He was unprepared for her good spirits when she, too, awoke; her gaiety and laughter were as warming to him as sunshine. She made a jest of

everything and was not discouraged at all; she was eager for breakfast, and debated with much crinkling of her pretty brows, whether or not they could afford a quarter each.

Indeed, throughout those long days, she never wavered nor repined. Accustomed to ease, luxury, servants, everything that wealth could buy, she seemed not to give their loss a thought. She would sit in wayside eating-houses, swinging saucily on her stool, and nod at Matt over her upraised cup, or give him a bite of her pie when, after deliberation, he had chosen an apple instead. She made friends with the newsboy, and persuaded him to leave his stack of books and magazines on their seat; she made friends with the fat man, who had left Chicago with them, and borrowed his playing cards; she romped with the children in the aisle, and helped their weary mothers to undress them at night and put them to bed; she was always the first out at a stop and the last in, sparklingly alive and full of zest. She had the delightful faculty of investing petty things with interest, and of enriching them with imagination and humor; so that the dog in the baggage-car, or the sick old gentleman with the white hat, or the college boy's flirtation with the painted lady took on a to-be-continued-in-our-next value when embellished by her vivacious fancy.

To Matt and her the frowsy old car was a heaven on wheels; love had touched it with a magic wand; what did it matter if their meals were pinched and

they had to take count of every nickel. They were always counting their money and scheming economies, but it was hard, for they were young and well and hungry, and could eat a whole quarter each and still want more. Matt was a terrible cheat, and was capable of munching air and doing grand-stand play with a paper napkin in order to produce an unexpected present of candy afterward —tender artifices, often detected and hotly punished; but never without a welling of that girlish heart, and a smile was sometimes very close to tears. And all the while they were rolling westward, over plain and desert, past cities and snow-capped mountains; and with them rolled the dog in the baggage-car, the sick old gentleman in the white hat, the admiring newsboy and the fat man—all that little world of which for a time they were a part.

It was dark when they reached the Oakland mole and took the ferry across the bay to San Francisco. Dark and foggy and biting cold, with a smell of the sea, and of tar, and ships, and mud-flats. They were disgorged like cattle on the other side, streaming down into a crowd of hotel touts, cabmen and transfer men, with street-cars whirling on turntables and mobbed as they turned. But there were no cabs for them, no street-cars.

Matt, weighed down with a suit-case in one hand and the heavy portmanteau in the other, led the way through the mean, evil streets. Drunken sailors jostled them; squalid basements emitted discordant

music and the sound of women's voices; the air smelled rankly of stale vegetables and decaying oranges. Matt was glad to get through this low quarter and into the safer and more familiar region of Montgomery Avenue. To Chris it hardly seemed a change for the better, for it was still a poor neighborhood, and though the buildings increased in size, they were old, with dingy entrances, and wore an aspect of neglect and dilapidation.

They crossed the avenue, passed a brilliantly lighted saloon on the corner, and entered a cheap rooming-house, whose exterior was scarcely less forbidding than the others. Matt had dilated on the old-fashioned coziness of No. 7, Washington Block, but as seen by the two tired travelers on that foggy night it was hard to fit it in with his enthusiastic description. But a nice, motherly woman on the second floor did something to dull the edge of their disappointment. This was Miss Diehl, the agent, who, after a parley in her own spotless room, offered them one on the next floor for two dollars a week. If this were less spotless it had the distinction of having been an author's, who had been ejected the day before, though nothing would ever eject the holes his cigarettes had burned in the carpet or a peculiar smell that seemed to be of sausages cooked over the gas-jet. But two dollars a week was not much, and Jim, the Chinaman, would lay fresh sheets—and so the arrangement was concluded.

As the door closed on Miss Diehl, Chris, who

was sitting on the bed, looked up and said with a strange earnestness: "Matt, I want to tell you something."

"Why, what is it?" he asked carelessly.

"We were followed all the way up from the ferry."

"Followed?"

"Yes, a man followed us; I'm positive of it."

"Boo! I don't believe it."

"But he did, dear, truly he did, and when we crossed the street down there he came up so close I could have touched him."

"My poor darling, don't talk rot. He may have been simply coming the same way we did."

"Then why did he keep staring and pretending he wasn't?"

"Because you are so pretty."

"But he stared at you, too."

"Because I was so lucky—to be your husband."

This flattering explanation did not satisfy Chris; she rose, and going to the window, looked out.

"Oh, Matt, there he is now!" she cried. "Come quick."

But Matt was too late; the man had disappeared in the direction of the saloon.

They stood there, Chris in a tremble, Matt unconvinced, yet somehow anxious.

"Nobody could harm us here," he exclaimed, trying to make a joke of it. "Forty men, all following us in single file, couldn't hurt us, could they?"

But Chris was shaking, and the hand that sought his own was as cold as ice. "Matt, I'm frightened," she said.

Matt had intended to go to Snood and Hargreaves and, demanding an explanation of their outrageous conduct, force them to a settlement. His position was unassailable. If they could show him no ring —and he knew they did not have it—he could threaten them with the police and press them to the wall. But the unwisdom of such a course grew more and more apparent. It would be tantamount to announcing his arrival to Mr. Kay, with unforeseeable dangers and consequences. But if Kay were already on his track, and if the man of overnight were indeed a spy, nothing could be gained, but much lost, by sparing the jewelers. This was the question that animated Chris and Matt as they breakfasted the next morning in a little Italian restaurant, leaning their elbows on the table with their heads close together in eager consultation.

Somehow the daylight had a dissipating effect on the personage that had followed them from the ferry. Matt was more incredulous and Chris not half so sure as she had been. She admitted being overstrained; admitted the unlikeliness of her conjecture and was willing enough to ascribe it to a baseless apprehension. Then in that case why rouse sleeping lions? It was decided to allow the sleeping lions to sleep on undisturbed—in the meanwhile

at all events. Roused lions, even if compelled to disgorge, would certainly keep the wires hot, and bring Kay and his myrmidons by the first express.

No, Snood and Hargreaves were put by as a last resort, only to be braved in the extremity of misfortune. Instead, Matt would make the round of the business houses with which he had formerly dealt on John Mort's behalf and borrow sufficient money, if he could, for a steerage passage in the mail-steamer to Samoa.

Chris accompanied him. It was a blustering, windy day, bleak and cheerless, and it seemed to become bleaker and more cheerless still as Matt was denied at one office after another. He was the victim of bygone zeal, of bygone loyalty and honesty. However lightly he had spent his own money, he had always been a hard bargainer where John Mort's was concerned. How remorselessly that "five per cent. for cash" now rose in judgment against him—that "I can do better at Turner's," or whatever it was—to bring down the price.

He was shabby; he was hesitating; he had none of the enticing arts nor breezy joviality that compromised the lender before he could temper his welcome to changed conditions. What business man does not know the type? The trusted employee of a rich customer, once so keen in buying, and so ready with his check-book, now transformed into a low-voiced mendicant, who must raise a certain sum to get from somewhere to somewhere else.

Matt listened to those transparent subterfuges which have done duty for a thousand years—decreased trade, "don't know which way to turn myself,"—and all the rest of it, retiring crestfallen, usually with nothing, though once with three dollars and another time with five.

One merchant took him curtly to task.

"Favors breed favors," he said. "You always stood out for your pound of flesh. It's very praiseworthy to guard your boss's interests, but if you had bought of us at catalogue prices you would have fallen on a feather-bed instead of the cobbles."

So it went on with varying rebuffs, sometimes not altogether unkind, sometimes insufferable in their rudeness and rancor—with a rare five, and once a ten-dollar gold piece. Chris turned whiter and whiter from the misery of repeated failure and the fatigue of standing and loitering; and after a pretense at lunch in a cheap eating-place she was sent home alone while Matt continued his depressing tour. By four o'clock he had to confess himself beaten. Except for a ship-chandler at the foot of Market Street, the list of possible lenders was exhausted. But he had never put much business in this man's way, whose last name he had some trouble in remembering. Yes, Coleman, that was it—Joe Coleman, a jolly old Englishman as round as a tub.

Coleman greeted him heartily—so heartily that Matt was ashamed of the surprise he was about to spring.

"You'd better be careful, Joe," he said, with a wretched effort at a smile. "I'm on my uppers, and every shake of my hand may cost you five dollars."

"The hell it will!" exclaimed Coleman, in sham trepidation. "Here, sit down on that barrel and have a cigar. Bless you, lad, it's like old times to see you again. Not been making out very well, eh? More bumps than milk punch? Well, cheer up, and pass the tambourine."

Joe was a common old fellow, but his robust good-will and sympathy were very warming. Puffing at his cigar and leaning against an anchor, he told Matt "to get on with his tale of woe."

Matt obeyed—but with reservations, saying briefly that he had tried shore life and failed and wanted to return to the Islands.

"That's easy," said Coleman. "No need to be so blue about it."

"Easy? Do you think I can swim there or what?"

"I mean I'm good for a hundred dollars. I always liked you, Broughton, and when I like a man it don't stop at the trousers' pocket. Bless your handsome face, it don't. All you've to do is to catch the mail-boat and make a bee-line for the cocoanuts and the wahines."

"I have mine with me, Joe. I'm married."

"Oh, I say!" Coleman exclaimed, rubbing his chin and looking worried. "You've been going it, haven't you? A hundred dollars is about my limit; I couldn't go more than a hundred, and that's what

they charge for a single passage to Samoa—hold on, though, I have it—ship steward, or work your way, and let wifey be the passenger."

"But they would make me sign to Australia—sign for the run."

"Jump the ship."

"I don't know about that, Joe. Suppose they kept me and landed her. It's too great a risk."

"Oh, you could manage it."

"I've put chaps in irons myself for the same sort of game, and I tell you, Joe—"

The sentence remained unsaid, and Matt's mouth stayed open as Coleman suddenly dashed to the door and grabbed the arm of a man who had stopped for a moment to peer in. He was a short, thick-set person of a seafaring cut, with the appearance of a North German or a Scandinavian, and popping blue eyes that danced with good humor. He was effusively introduced to Matt as Captain Schwartz, of the schooner *Esmeralda*.

"You damned old ——," cried Coleman, affectionately flopping him in the stomach. "Where have you been keeping yourself? I fancied you had up with the mudhook and cleared a month ago."

"No such luck," growled Captain Schwartz in a strong German accent. "Everybody behind; everybody humbugging; drouble, drouble, drouble all the time."

"Here's some more," said Coleman cheerfully, indicating Matt. "He's going with you, and when

may he come aboard? He's a South Sea captain like yourself, and has lost his ship."

"Ship? Vat ship?" inquired Schwartz, awakening to interest.

"The topsail schooner, *North Star,*" said Matt in a shiver of expectation and hope.

"He's stuck here without a cent," put in Coleman, "and it don't matter to him much where you land him as long as it is something dry, with a palm tree on it and cold missionary on the sideboard."

They all laughed at this, and then Schwartz said: "I wasn't meaning to stop anywhere this side of the Solomons—but he can gome, he can gome!" Laying his hand on Matt's shoulder, he added: "Old South Sea captains should stand together. You'd have done the same for me, and dat is all there is to it."

"Then you'll give me a passage?" cried Matt, hardly able to credit his good fortune.

"Sure I will," returned Schwartz, "and I'll put you ashore anywhere on the line of march."

"His wife's along," interjected Coleman, winking at Matt; "and a corking young woman she is, too. Sings splendid and plays the mandoleen, and it will be dandy of a moonlight night to sit on the poop and hear her."

"You got a wife?" asked the captain, apparently much pleased. "Say, but dat will be fine! Young, she is?"

"Twenty-three," replied Matt.

Schwartz looked happier than ever.

"You come on to Malaita," he said. "Me, I am married, too, and got two leetle babies, so high—everything fine, fine, but my wife she is very lonesome for white society—I think she jump for joy to see another young white lady. And I'll get you a good poseetion on the plantation or in the company's store."

The good-hearted little captain had settled it all, and volubly repudiated any other course than that Matt should accompany him to the Solomons. The more he talked, the more enthusiastic he became, opening his watch and showing a photograph of his wife and children. His wife was named Hilda, and this was Wilhelm, and this was Hildebrand, and—

Joe, who believed in hitting while the iron was hot, carried them down the street to a bar, where they drank a cocktail at his expense, and another round at the captain's expense, and another round at Matt's expense, and grew increasingly friendly and confidential. Then nothing would satisfy Schwartz but that he should return with Matt to Washington Block and be present when the great news was broken to Chris. Saying good-by to Coleman they started, walking arm in arm, like a pair of cronies, with tongues loosened by the liquor they had drunk, and Matt inexpressibly grateful and elated—for the *Esmeralda* was to sail the next day, and Schwartz had promised him

the owner's cabin, as well as inviting him and Chris to dine on board that very night. By way of celebration Matt bought a bunch of roses and a box of candy, and it was in this gala fashion and with overflowing spirits that he mounted the stairs of No. 7 and knocked at Chris' door.

"Shake hands with the best and kindest fellow in the world," he exclaimed, as she shrank at the sight of a stranger. "Chris, this is Captain Schwartz, of the schooner *Esmeralda,* who has dropped from heaven to rescue us."

"Dis is the first time I was ever reported from heaven," said Schwartz, laughing explosively. "Delighted to meet you, Mrs. Broughton.—No, thank you, I vill not sit down.—I weeshed merely to give my invitation in person, and extend the courtesies of my ship to so charming a lady."

"Invitation?"

Chris raised her tear-stained face to her husband in inquiry. She was timid and confused, and at a loss to understand what had happened.

"The captain wants us to dine on board to-night," Matt explained, "and to-morrow we sail with him to the Islands! Just think of it, Chris—we're sailing to-morrow, actually sailing *to-morrow!*"

"Anywhere you like, old chap," put in Schwartz royally, "though if you will listen to me, Mrs. Broughton, you will go on to Malaita, where my wife is, and the captain can get a good poseetion."

"And we're to have the owner's cabin, Chris,"

cried Matt. "Did you ever hear the like of that! Isn't that kind, though? Isn't that wonderful? Isn't that dropping from heaven?"

Chris, now excited too, admitted that it was, and with shining eyes regarded the man to whom they owed so much. If he were not very prepossessing in appearance, and was more boisterous and familiar than so short an acquaintance warranted, he certainly must have a heart of gold; and she ascribed his shortcomings to a not unworthy desire to place them at their ease. She thanked him warmly, and exerted herself with all her woman's art to cement a friendship that seemed destined to extricate them from their difficulties.

After some further conversation the two men left her to complete her toilet, and a little later she joined them at the entrance of No. 7. From here they took a street-car to the water-front, where they walked along on foot until they reached the wharf where the *Esmeralda* was lying. In contrast with the towering clipper ships all about her the *Esmeralda* appeared to be a toy, and so diminutive that they had to descend to her deck by a ladder. She was a typical South Sea schooner, built on sharp and yacht-like lines and heavily sparred for her size, which Schwartz informed them was ninety-four tons. She had a broad, low house aft, a mainboom that extended twenty feet or more beyond the taffrail, and in her waist, on chocks, the usual disproportionately large surf-boat.

In the little main cabin they were made acquainted with Mr. Brandeis, the mate, who was making up his accounts at the table, with small piles of gold and silver coin stacked on the various bills. Mr. Brandeis was a very fair, irritable-looking man of fifty or so, with a lank mustache, who spoke no English, and shook hands solemnly at his superior's bidding. Then he sat down again and resumed his occupation of counting out money from a cigar-box, as though with the completion of that formality his share of the social function was over.

"A goot chap," said Captain Schwartz, smiling, laying his hand on the mate's shoulder. "Reads books—all the time he reads books—and never talks except to contradict you, and say you are a liar on page seventy-nine, or a dom fool on page two hundred and three. Some day I'll throw him overboard and shoot his books after him and say: 'Go and prove it to the feesh!' "

This amused the captain so much that he had to repeat it in German to Brandeis, who answered somewhat curtly, and tugged at his mustache as though none too pleased. Matt thought it spoke rather poorly of the ship's discipline that the mate took the joke in such bad part. It would not have happened on *his* vessel, he said to himself, and before guests. But Schwartz did not seem to mind, and turned away without the least annoyance to show them the cabins.

There was one on either side of the main-cabin,

the captain's to starboard, the mate's on the port side. Beyond the captain's, and reached by a narrow passageway, was the "owner's cabin"—another cubical with barely room for a couple of bunks, superimposed. Like the others, it was very fresh and clean, with a couple of portholes giving ample light, and enough locker-space to put away a considerable amount of clothes. There was a tiny washstand in one corner, a bracket with a brass lamp, and a strip of new matting on the floor.

"This is where you will live," said the captain to Chris, who was regarding everything with much curiosity. "And if you wish to do any shopping, I hope you will not forget our old established peeziness!" As he spoke he opened the door opposite and ushered her into the trade-room. This was the largest cabin on the ship, and was a veritable floating shop, with a counter and shelves, scales and primitive showcases. It contained everything under the sun, from brass wedding-rings, Waterbury watches, tools of all kinds, jews'-harps and flints for flintlock muskets, to boat-anchors, kegs of dynamite, barrels of beef and pork, and innumerable bolts of gaily printed cottons. Behind the counter and still open was a small hatchway that gave access to the hold beneath, from which the voices of sailors could be heard.

"We are going down pretty light," explained the captain, "and the mate thinks he can make a faster passage by shifting some ballast aft."

"But what do you want with all those things?" asked Chris, to whom a sea-shop was a novelty.

"Sell them to the noble savage at three hundred per cent. profit," returned Schwartz, laughing.

"But what are those guns over there for in the rack?"

"To shoot him if he ain't satisfied!—They are a tricky lot, Mrs. Broughton, and, like all customers, are ready to beat you down—only they do it with a cloob!"

Chris shrank a little closer to Matt, who reassured her by remarking that their islands would not be like that.

"The captain means the Solomons," he said. "Down there they are coal-black and eat you for dinner, but our people are a nice brown and wouldn't hurt a fly."

"You've never told me where you want to go," put in Schwartz. "Vare is that delightful place so different from the Solomons?"

"Really, Captain, I don't want to take you out of your course," returned Matt seriously. "The Gilbert Islands are in your way—drop us there anywhere."

Schwartz shrugged his shoulders.

"What's a few days, more or less," he exclaimed. "No, you tell me vare you vant to go, and there I shall sail—though why not Malaita?"

"The Tokelaus would suit me best."

"The Tokelaus, vare is dem?"

"Well, the Union Islands—to call them the name they have on most charts."

"The Union Islands! Yass, I know the Union Islands. A little south, but what's that? Old South Sea captains should stand together, that's what I say!"

"Oh, Captain, I'll never be able to thank you enough."

"Dat's all foolishness, Broughton. You would do the same for me."

Schwartz's tone was cordiality itself; indeed, his spirits seemed to rise with his companions', and his good-nature increased to an hilarious pitch. He kept laughing from sheer exuberance, and as he led the way back on deck he gave Mr. Brandeis a hearty poke in the ribs and told him they were bound for the Tokelau Islands. The mate paid scarcely any attention, except to nod, and continued to dip into the cigar-box of cash with a sardonic expression that appeared to be habitual with him. But as they were mounting the companion-ladder, Matt looked back and perceived him galvanized into a belated interest, with a chart in front of him, and an eager thumb evidently seeking the Union Archipelago.

They stayed on the poop, talking, and watching the sun go down, until a Japanese steward appeared to announce that supper was ready. They followed him below, where, to Matt's surprise, he found the mate included in the party. They drew

up their stools to the table, which looked very inviting with its spotless table-cloth, a vase of sweet-peas, and a bottle of sparkling Moselle set at the captain's right hand. The china, glass and cutlery were of the commonest, but they suited the pleasant sea atmosphere of the cabin, and spoke of homely comfort and of a simplicity not without a charm of its own.

The meal was to match, substantial and plain, including plum-duff and Limburger cheese. The captain kept the bottle busy, ordered another and kept that busy too, drinking every one's health in turn with German punctiliousness. This involved drinking the captain's health in turn, the silent mate's health—everybody's health—with formality and bowing and much clinking of glasses. To Chris it was a peep into another life, and struck her as extraordinarily picturesque and interesting. She enjoyed the deference of these rough men, appreciated their unaffected kindness—tinged with romance and sparkling Moselle. The jolly little captain had placed the whole ship at her disposal and had appointed her queen of the ocean. He was rewarded by being made a baron, at which Mr. Brandeis unbent sufficiently to take mock offense, and had to be consoled by a decoration of blue ribbon from Chris' neck—the Exalted Order of Jonah, with the privilege of wearing a jeweled whale on state occasions.

Afterward black coffee was served on deck in white mugs with handles, and a phonograph was set going by the mate and continued by the Japanese

steward. As Chris was chilly and had brought no wrap, the captain doubled up the German flag and folded her in it; and it was thus draped that she sat on the poop and held Matt's hand in the dark. Above them rose the bow of a huge four-master, whose sailors were clustered together, also listening to the music, and occasionally joining in one of the choruses. The water slopped against the piles and gurgled along the schooner's sides; red and green lights skimmed the shadowy surface of the bay, borne by unseen tugs or launches; giant ferry boats glimmered in the distance and blew melodious warnings from their deep-toned throats. To the young lady in the German flag it was an evening never to be forgotten; she felt herself on the edge of an unknown world; she was glad of the phonograph that allowed her to lie back and dream undisturbed.

"Ten o'clock to-morrow," said the captain as they stood on the wharf. "We tow out with the tide, you know—mustn't keep us waiting."

"You will see us at dawn," returned Matt with a laugh. "Won't he, Chris?"

"At breakfast, anyhow," she answered gaily. "May we come to breakfast, Baron?"

"May you come?" exclaimed Schwartz. "Vat a foolish vay for a queen to talk about her royal yacht. Behold, I vill order ze gold plates, and instruct ze major-domo to warn ze Japanese gentlemen-in-waiting!"

With this they parted, the captain descending the ladder while Matt and Chris walked through the vast shed and past the watchman at the gate.

"Oh, Matt, isn't he splendid!"

"Schwartz? Why, he's just the best little fellow that ever lived."

"And I liked the mate, too—liked him immensely."

"So did I. He's one of those quiet men that grow on you."

"And wasn't the Moselle good, though!"

"And the dinner! By George, what a change after those ring-a-ling eating-houses, and that slabby marble place to-day, where you seemed to be eating off tombstones."

"And we're going, Matt—we're going!"

"Sail to-morrow at ten o'clock!"

"It's like a fairy tale, isn't it? Think of our having a little fairy ship all ready and waiting for us!"

"It makes me shiver to think at how narrowly we might have missed it."

"But Matt, we've caught it! Just by one day, we've caught it!"

It is supposed to be extremely indecorous to show affection on the street; but it was such a dark street, and there was nobody in sight anywhere, and why shouldn't an ecstatically happy man kiss his ecstatically happy little wife, and even press her for a moment to his heart?

If the stars blinked, well—

CHAPTER XX

A STARTLING DISCOVERY

TEN days had passed since the tug cast them off beyond the Golden Gate, and with three toots of farewell left them to shift for themselves. Ten days of heavenly peace, with the sails scarcely touched, and rustling softly before an unfailing breeze. The air was balmy; the recurring bells, as the helmsman struck the time, alone measured a pleasant monotony that seemed otherwise to have no break. There were glorious sunsets, velvety nights, mornings of magic freshness, and always in the center of that silent world was the *Esmeralda,* dipping her nose in the long blue swell.

She was a very quiet ship. In all his sea-experience Matt had never known a quieter. There was none of the usual singing, no horseplay, no loud good-humor—no fo'castle accordion, no fo'castle jollity. In all, there were seven men forward, who might have been seven authors, from the assiduous way they read—grave, oldish men for the most part, always glued to books under that tarpaulin in the waist. Herman was the only youth among them—tall, whitey-blond Herman, who tried to make friends with the passengers till he was

squelched by the mate. After that he became a reader too, though rather an unwilling reader, much given to lying on his back and staring up at the sky. In fact, that appeared to be his principal occupation, for he never took a trick at the wheel nor lifted his hand to a rope, even during a squall or in any other emergency.

Schwartz, though less of a reader than Brandeis or the others, very soon ran dry as a conversationalist. He became bottled up and uncommunicative, spending hours at a time in his cabin, or walking up and down the poop in a brown study none dared to disturb. This was the only prerogative of a captain that he treated himself to, beyond taking his place at the head of the table. Mr. Brandeis took all the observations, gave all the orders; shortened sail or ran up kites without even going through the form of consulting his superior. He was the virtual commander of the ship, and made very little pretense that he was not. Matt noted that Schwartz stood no watch, but allowed his to be taken by the second mate, a ponderous individual of sixty, with white side-whiskers, who was called Krantz and berthed forward with the men.

This familiarity between officers and men was new to Matt. Mr. Brandeis was not above mixing with them under the tarpaulin, and adding his cigar and book to that sprawling circle. Here he might be seen, prone with the rest, often on one elbow, talking in an emphatic, scolding manner as though chal-

lenging contradiction and overriding it roughshod. Matt had to admit that the mate did not appear to lose caste in consequence. On the contrary, he was treated with great respect, and Herman in particular never failed to spring up at his approach, no matter how engrossed he might be at the moment in the sky.

The two Japanese, Yonida, the steward, and Fusi, the cook, were not behindhand, either, as readers. Yonida was a man of evident intelligence; his library included a work on conic sections, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* and a number of others of the same massive caliber. Poor, fat-faced, stupid Fusi held tight to the only book he possessed, Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help,* which he absorbed with the painstaking industry of a boa-constrictor. Sitting at the door of his spotless galley, often with the bread-pans stretched out in front of him, each loaded with dough and awaiting some mysterious completion, Fusi would engage in the struggle of adding one more paragraph of *Self-Help* to his slowly acquired store. Matt could not pass him without being asked what "intention" meant, or "precluded," or some other equally insurmountable rock that was blocking Fusi's path to knowledge. He wrote down the answers in a little washing-book, and boa-constrictored them with an abstracted air, till you almost seemed to see the hind-legs of the word sticking out of his mouth.

An indefinable suspicion was beginning to creep

into Matt's mind that there was something wrong with the ship. The transformation of Schwartz from an amiable, talkative, friendly little man into the taciturn creature who paced the poop, or wrote for hours in his cabin, struck oddly on Matt's attention. The gruff mate was gruffer than ever, and showed an increasing disinclination to let Matt see the chart as the vessel's course was plotted from day to day. There was none of the usual thawing that takes place on a long voyage, none of the usual intimacy and good-fellowship. Of all the crew, Herman had been the only one to make any advances, and his had been the only smile to greet Matt and Chris, until Brandeis had roughly sent him about his business—if lying under the lee of the surf-boat and gazing for ever at the sky could be called a business. Herman seemed privileged to do this as much as he pleased, undisturbed. And these white and whiskered patriarchs?—Was it a floating old men's home, or what?

The humorous view with which these things were at first regarded changed imperceptibly as time wore on. Who was this strange Schwartz, and this strange Brandeis, and what had been the secret of the former's impulsive good-will in San Francisco? Nothing now was heard of old South Sea captains standing together. The amazing fact dawned on Matt that Schwartz was no seaman at all, but a landsman masquerading as the master of the vessel. A few questions, put as a test, had shown his abysmal

ignorance of the sea and of everything appertaining to it. Yet for whose benefit could such an imposture be practised? Surely not for his and Chris', though— Was it possible that they were prisoners on this singular ship? Comfortable, well-fed, politely-treated—prisoners?

To increase Matt's misgivings, Chris, who was a lighter sleeper than himself, had been hearing "noises" in the middle of the night. She described them as "funny, snapping sounds" that commenced after Schwartz had passed their door, and looked in —as though to assure himself that they were asleep. She was so positive of this that Matt could not shake her, which, with incredulity, he tried to do. No, it was not a dream. No, she had seen him just as plainly as she now saw Matt. In pajamas, barefooted, and peering in—she could not be mistaken. One only dreamed a dream once, but this happened regularly, and besides, there were the "noises."

Matt determined to stay awake and see and hear for himself. If it were fancy on Chris' part, the sooner she was undeceived the better, for she was nervous and frightened, and had moments of passionately wishing they had never set foot on the *Esmeralda.* Accordingly, one night, instead of climbing to the berth above, Matt tucked in with Chris below, with the idea that it would be less easy to fall asleep in such extremely confined quarters.

Midnight struck—eight bells. Half after midnight—one bell. One o'clock—two bells. Half

after one—three bells. He grew drowsier and drowsier. Why would not Chris leave him alone? —Awake? Of course he was awake, only that he was in his old bedroom at Mrs. Sattane's, and— He was roused again, and was made to understand, not without difficulty, that four bells had just gone; was shaken and pummeled till he sat up and bumped his head. It bumped him back to consciousness, and to a realization of the watch he was supposed to be keeping. He crouched there, now wide awake and alert, listening intently.

Suddenly Chris clutched him.

"He's coming," she whispered. "Matt, he's coming—I heard the door—"

Matt held his breath. The door must have indeed opened, for the passageway became lighted, although dimly, by the lamp in the main-cabin. Matt hurriedly lay down and closed his eyes almost shut, peeping through the lashes. As he did so he had a sight of Schwartz, tiptoeing past their door. No, not past it, for the man stopped on his way and cast a quick glance within. He was in his pajamas; his face was a study of furtiveness and caution; he, too, was holding his breath and seemed to be on edge with suspense. Then he tiptoed on and was seen no more.

"Didn't I tell you?" murmured Chris. "In a moment the noises will begin."

"Sh-h-h," returned Matt. "Sh-h-h!"

It was more than a moment, however, before the

quiet was disturbed. Both waited with straining ears, but nothing came to them beyond the rippling of the water along the schooner's keel, and the creak of cordage and timbers as the vessel sank into the swell or rose on its turgid crest. A ship under way is never altogether silent; she moves with a myriad plaintive noises, some of them lullingly liquid, others hoarse and humming.

"There! There!" exclaimed Chris.

A peculiar jarring sound became faintly audible, as though some machinery had been set in motion. But it was too irregular for machinery, and had an indescribable thrilling quality that Matt was at a loss to account for. The cabin shivered with it; it was as fine as the lash of a whip and as vicious, as it seemed to sting the air. Matt leaped from the bunk, despite Chris' entreaties. By George, he was going to see what it was; follow Schwartz and find out. Harm? Well, wasn't it better to risk a little than to cower under the coverlet like ninnies? There had always been something wrong with the ship, something queer—but this was the climax. She must let him go—he had to go.

He stole into the passage toward the door that opened on the waist companion-ladder. The door was shut, and for an instant he hesitated, with his hand on the knob. Then he drew it back, slipped swiftly down the ladder and gained the lee of the galley. Here, bent double, he stopped to reconnoiter, attempting to pierce the deep shadows about him,

and wondering whether they did not conceal eyes as watchful as his own.

Little by little he regained his courage. The night was intensely dark; if he had gone thus far without detection the rest ought not to be hard. All the while there was that snap-snap-snapping, ominous and startling, that appeared to have its source at the foot of the foremast. He crept along the surf-boat, pausing at the forward chock in which its stem was imbedded, and huddled against it. But what was that opaque and unexpected mass outlined just forward of the foremast? An erection seven or eight feet high, and about half that width, which loomed before him, silhouetted against the stars?

He nerved himself to advance again, with the stealth of a hunter stalking a deer—slowly, crouchingly, taking advantage of every cover; dubious even of the starlight; inch by inch, obliquely, so as to reach the starboard scuppers, pass the foremast and be able to look back. A voice was now intermingled with that snap-snap-snapping, keeping pace with it—a man's voice, guttural, thick and droning, the words half-drowned in the rasp and sizzle.

Matt worked his way along the scuppers, head down, scraping the side of the ship, feeling in front with his hands, propelling himself from behind with his naked feet. He was on fire with curiosity, yet was patient; snailing on and on, not daring to turn till he had reached the gear of the jibs, which marked the limit he had set, before he would risk

rising to discover the secret of this extraordinary affair.

It was an astonishing sight that met his gaze. Forward of the foremast was a sort of hut, constructed of mattresses, forming a wind-break or shield, open only to the fo'castle. Within it, seated on a box, was Herman, bent over an apparatus, and causing it, by means of a small brass handle, to emit that astounding buzzing, as well as an incessant sputter of sparks and flashes. There was no listlessness now in that gawky youth. His expression was keen; his hand moved the key with lightning precision; he had an unmistakable air of mastery and skill, as of a man engaged in something he excelled in. Beside him stood Schwartz, holding a lantern, and apparently dictating from a sheaf of papers. The little captain, also, was transformed; had the same look of capacity and absorption; had something even more, something formidable and military in his bearing, as though dealing with vital issues on the battlefield itself.

Wireless! Of course it was the wireless. Matt had read of it, but had never seen it before in action. Zi, zi—zizizizi—zi—zi-zi-zi-zi-zi! The brass lever darted up and down, lingered and snapped amid a splutter of sparks and flashes; the captain, holding his place with his thumb, reeled off sentence after sentence in a low, vibrant voice; the lantern light flickered over the yellow sheets, over Herman's bent head, encased in a curious harness, over the gleam-

ing apparatus. Occasionally Schwartz was warned to stop. The machine no longer transmitting, would receive. Zi, zizi, zi-zi-zi-zi—with this time Herman repeating, word by word, the message thus mysteriously caught from space, while Schwartz listened darkly, with preoccupation, seeing the unseen, weighing and understanding what was being told him.

Matt returned as he had come, more concerned than ever not to betray himself. The discovery had daunted him; he was in the grip of terror; he had the sensation of a man with the roar of Niagara in his ears, and his boat nearing the brink. Who were these people? What was their purpose? With whom were they communicating across the night? Whose was the hand that held the answering key? Whose the mind that directed the little vessel from afar? He had been lured aboard her; had been tricked like a child; was being borne, virtually a prisoner, to—what?

He was so agitated that he could scarcely speak, as Chris, on guard at the door, shut it behind him, and breathlessly asked what he had seen.

"They're working a wireless apparatus," he answered.

"Wireless, Matt! You don't mean a wireless telegraph?"

"Yes. Herman's operating it and Schwartz is sending messages."

"You actually *saw* them?"

"Yes, inside a lot of mattresses by the foremast—

to deaden the sound, of course, and keep us from hearing."

It was Chris' turn to tremble—to feel that sudden catch at the heart.

"Why—why should they do that, Matt?"

"God knows."

"Do you suppose it had a-a-anything to do with u-us?"

"They wouldn't hide it if it hadn't."

"But what are we to do?"

"I don't know."

"Couldn't you speak to Schwartz—make a stand about it—threaten him?"

"What with?"

"Well—"

Matt laughed.

"We're prisoners on this damned ship," he said. "Chris, they've kidnapped us."

"But isn't that a terrible thing to do?"

"For us—yes."

"But couldn't they all be punished and sent to prison?"

"Possibly if the *Oregon* ranged alongside—but where is your *Oregon?*"

"Then we are utterly helpless?"

"That's about it."

"You don't think they ever meant to land us in the Tokelaus?"

"Chris, this whole ship, and the whole crew, must have been waiting for us in San Francisco, like a lot

of spiders for two little flies. Tokelaus! We'll never see any Tokelaus. That was all part of the scheme to hoodwink us—to get us away."

"But what could they want with us?"

"Want with us? Why, they want John Mort!"

"Oh, Matt!"

"Yes, the same people who are running this ship are the same that drove me out of Manaswan! Bribing me failed; force failed, but they were cunning enough to know that rather than starve I'd double back to the islands. So there was Schwartz all ready, with his ship and his blarney, and his spider's web across the road I was bound to take."

"But if that were so, why should they be backward now?"

"Backward?"

"Why hasn't the captain tried to make you tell? Tried to force you to tell?"

"That's coming. As sure as I am alive, that's coming."

"Coming?"

"When we reach the people who are answering our wireless. There's hell ahead, Chris."

"Well, in that case, you'll simply have to take the only way out."

"I'll never do that—never."

"But Matt, they might—"

"Sure to. I'll have to stand all I can. A pretty black lookout, isn't it?"

"Rather than have you hurt I'll tell everything myself."

"You shan't."

"I will, Matt, I will!"

"You don't know where this island is. You don't know the bearings. What could you tell them that they don't know?"

She whispered something back that blanched his face.

For a moment he was silent. It had never come to him that their deviltry might be turned against Chris.

"By God, I'll sink the ship first!" he cried.

CHAPTER XXI

DANGER ABOVE AND BELOW

IT was difficult, once the *Esmeralda* had been revealed in her true character, to maintain the fiction of unconcern. But it was evident policy to do so, lest something worse might befall, and Matt and Chris were perseveringly friendly to the careworn captain, and to the sulky, sardonic mate. They judged it wise to talk a great deal of the Tokelaus, and of their plan afterward to reach Samoa and start a little cacao plantation. Schwartz had altogether abandoned the pretense of inviting them to continue the trip to Malaita. But they discussed it openly as a possibility they had considered and finally negatived, preferring Samoa and cacao. Sitting at the cabin table, and under the unrelaxing scrutiny of their two jailers, they estimated the number of trees they meant to plant to an acre, the proper shade to be used, the various methods of fermenting the product—figuring profits, and frequently, for the sake of appearance, disagreeing quite hotly.

Privately, a much more important matter was engrossing their attention. Matt's cry, wrung from his desperation, that he would sink the schooner had

given him the germ of an idea. Yes, why not sink her—not from any notion of wild revenge—but as a well-calculated solution of the perils surrounding them? To wait, in fact, until they knew there were islands near them and then, sinking the vessel, compel Schwartz to take to the surf-boat. This was a fine, big, carvel-built boat, twenty-six feet long, and Matt tested it with his penknife to make sure it was sound. It would easily hold all hands, with ample provisions and water, and a trip of sixty or eighty miles in it would be no terrible hardship. Compared to the unknown dangers that grew daily nearer, the hazard of such an escape seemed small indeed. And once ashore—anywhere ashore—they would be safe, for however primitive and loose the little native governments are, they are strong enough to protect the lives and persons of those within their rule. The native populations are essentially law-abiding; elementary human rights are enforced with guns and shark-toothed clubs; on the smallest atoll Schwartz would find himself powerless for evil, with an excellent chance of being tied hand and foot in cocoanut sinnett and cast into a coral prison if he attempted to coerce or interfere with a man so familiar with South Sea ways as Matt.

But to sink the *Esmeralda!* That was so easy to say! Of course a stick of dynamite would send her to the bottom in short order, and there was plenty of the deadly stuff in the trade-room, together with caps and fuses. But that was suicide. That was to

open a barn-door to the Pacific Ocean. The alternative was to chisel a good-sized hole in her garboard streak and give it about twice the bore of the bilge-pump.

The *Esmeralda* had an unusually good pump, worked by a couple of hand-spikes, and throwing a five-inch stream. Matt squared the circle industriously and then doubled the result, going over these calculations again and again to make sure of no mistake. What he aimed to accomplish was a leak that would force Schwartz to lay the vessel toward the nearest land, and perhaps bring it into view before there would be any need to take refuge in the whaler. On a two to one ratio of leak against pump, he hoped the *Esmeralda* might stay afloat for ten or twelve hours after he had achieved his purpose.

How little did Schwartz appreciate what was going on under his nose, during those long sweltering days in the Doldrums, or later when they picked up the South East Trades. Matt and Chris, snuggled closely in any strip of shade they could find, and to all appearance as busy as ever with their mythical plantation! They were for ever scribbling on sheets of paper and considering the results. There were dummies with such headings as: "Estimated yield for the fourth year. Food allowance for 18 laborers at 37 cents Chile a day. Probable profits on 3 acres of pineapples (a) First season (b) second season (c) third season"—dummies that were always very much in evidence when Schwartz or Brandeis

were about. But the dummies were a blind for other and more secret sheets conveying information of such supreme importance that it could not even be whispered.

There is not a spot on a small sailing vessel, unless it be the tip of the jib-boom, where one is secure from eavesdropping. Matt accordingly took no chances on this score, well aware that a single word might betray them. That they were under surveillance was increasingly borne in on them. Suspicion was breeding suspicion. Hence the scribbling that went on so continuously in the alleyway, or below in their cabin.

"Did you manage to slip into the trade-room?" Matt asked in writing.

"Yes—and found lots of tools."

"Chisels?"

"Yes—lots."

"How big?"

"All sizes—the largest about two inches wide."

"A mallet?"

"No."

"Hammers?"

"No. But there was a case marked *axes.*"

"Would it be hard to open?"

"I think it would."

"No hatchets?"

"Not one."

"Did you try to shift the hatch-cover?"

"Could not budge it, but you could."

"Were the chisels heavy?"

"Medium."

"Any augers?"

"What's an auger?"

"A giant gimlet."

"No, only little ones with a turn-wiggle."

"How big a hole could the biggest make?"

"Hardly an inch—no, less."

"Too small—but a two-inch chisel can be driven through anything."

"But what about the copper sheathing you were afraid of?"

"Drive through that, too—the trouble will be to get those axes out without a noise."

"Will you wait till the time comes, or choose one of those slam-bang calms? I used to think a calm was a calm till the last one jounced us to pieces."

"Better wait—make one job of it. Don't want S. nosing in there and turning things over."

"Have you any idea where we are?"

"Across the Line—that's all I know. B. has the chart locked in his room."

"How can you tell, then?"

"Only guess, but if we are where I think we are, we soon can't avoid picking up an island or two. Two reasons (1) birds to-day; (2) B. went aloft and spent an hour in the cross-trees with his glass."

"But you will make absolutely certain before attempting anything?"

"It will take a row of palm-trees to nerve me up to it! But we'll soon be seeing them, and then—!"

Courage and daylight go together. It is at night that the spirit shrinks; that the spine feels icy shivers; that the coward in all of us draws the bedclothes over his craven head. At night Matt and Chris were hardly able to keep their resolution alive. To send their bed, their home, their whole little world to the bottom of the sea horrified their imagination. The lisp and gurgle of the water outside gave a dread reality to the mental picture. It was the voice of death that rippled along the schooner's keel, that swirled in her wake, that foamed and splashed on the billowing crests, death, not the width of a hand away, cradling them in that fragile shell which they were mad enough to dream of destroying.

Had it not been for that other sound, never still in the deadest of the early hours, they might have abandoned their plan of sinking the *Esmeralda*. But the wireless had its own note of menace and was a perpetual reminder of dangers as real, as mysterious and terrible as any to be feared from the dark depths beneath them. When the wireless began to snap and hum they were heartened to a fresh determination to strike first, cost what it might. There was besides, in both those stubborn natures, a hatred of confessing themselves beaten. To turn the tables on Schwartz and Brandeis thrilled them with a

grim delight. Chris' hot little heart burned no less eagerly for revenge than Matt's. They had been fooled, lied to, successfully victimized and carried away, but—

They were twenty-four days out of San Francisco when the first land rose over the horizon. The absence of clouds above it proved it to be one of those coral atolls that abound in the Southern Ocean. To the eye it was a long, low blur, scarcely more than discernible on the rim of the sky; to the glass palms were visible, and the lake-like water of a lagoon whose farther confines were lost in the dip of the earth. The fact that they were at last in the zone of reefs and islands filled Matt and Chris with an overmastering excitement which the captain probably ascribed to the interest that always attends a landfall after a prolonged spell at sea. He was very much interested himself, as indeed was everybody—lending his binoculars willingly, exclaiming at the beauty of the shimmering, sapphire tints, and annoying Mr. Brandeis with his incessant questions.

To Matt the sight of the island was like a signal; it made him acutely restless and uncomfortable; he was possessed with the suffocating sense of almost terror that precedes all desperate deeds. Taking advantage of the commotion on deck, he ran below, watched his opportunity, and entered the trade-room. No cracksman, on his knees before a safe, and thrillingly conscious that at any moment he might be interrupted, could have

experienced more trepidation than did Matt as he sought out the case of axes and pried open the lid. He seized one and laid it aside, shoved back the case, and hastily covered it with the first things handy—some bolts of canvas and a couple of drums of niggerhead tobacco. Then, with a panicky glance at the door, which had no key in the lock nor any bolt, he went down on his knees before the hatch and fumbled with the ring countersunk in the planking.

He raised the cover with no great difficulty, and lifting it clear, stared into the depths. What he had feared most of all was that the after-hold might be filled with cargo. But as his eyes grew accustomed to the semi-darkness he saw nothing save a void, with a glimmer of pigs of iron-ballast, some metallically bright and others red with rust, showing dimly beneath. He breathed a sigh of relief; there was no cargo, no packed array of cases, crates and bales to thwart him.

He had had no intention of doing more than this —to make sure of his ax and to get some understanding of the problem that might confront him. He had not even told Chris, but darted below on an impulse, seizing an opportunity that might not occur again. Suddenly it came over him that the projected delay till night was a mistake. Here it was about two o'clock, with four hours yet to supper. The tramp of feet overhead, the voices, the exclamations—all showed that the island was the

only thought of those on deck. There never could be a better time, never, never. But where were the chisels Chris had spoken of? He rummaged about feverishly, searching for them—always with one eye on the door. What if she had hidden them? Could he dare go out and ask her—warn her? She must have missed him by now and was doubtless in an agony of suspense. But he did not dare; it was not in flesh and blood to incur the risk; he knew how certainly his face would betray him.

Oh, those chisels! What a fool he had been not to learn from Chris where they were. The whole thing might fail for that—fail through his stupidity. This was the time—now, now, now! He sought them like a maniac, spilling bolts of cotton, overturning boxes and packages. Perhaps under the counter? Good God, what was that lumpy object his fingers were closing on? A wrench! Then another wrench, the prickle of a file, a draw-knife, yes, a chisel—dozens of chisels, flung in pell-mell with the rest of the tools, and sparsely wrapped like them in coarse paper. He pulled the chisels out on the floor, gloating over them, always with his eyes on the door, always hearing the feet above, the voices, the confused movement that kept the ceiling creaking.

But how to descend, or rather, once down, how was he ever to scramble out? The hold was about nine or ten feet deep; he peered in again, gauging it. Rope? There was rope everywhere, compactly

coiled and burlapped. It would be quite a bother, though, to cut the fastenings; new rope also was sure to kink—to tangle and twist itself into snarls. Why not a bolt of that stout red cotton? It would be just as efficacious—more efficacious—limper. Yes, the stout red cotton by all means. It was twenty-two or twenty-four inches wide, and could easily bear the weight of a man. Matt made the loose end fast to a keg of nails and tossed the bolt itself down the hatchway; lowered the ax after it on a piece of twine; also a key-saw and a pair of chisels on another piece of twine.

What a pity Chris did not know! What a pity she was not on guard in the doorway of their cabin opposite! But perhaps she was there—she was so quick, so resourceful. Oh, if that wretched Fusi were to blunder in for a case of canned stuff or one of those hams; see the open hatch, and—! But the lazarette was his usual storehouse; the trade-room was seldom entered. Yet if Chris had been on guard his heart would have thumped less violently; she would have allowed nobody to get past her; it made him savage to think he was engaging in this alone.

Well, there was no help for it; it was now or never. Crushing the cotton in his hands he swung over the opening and let himself go. His feet touched the iron bars; all about him it was as black as pitch except under the twilight of the hatch. The air was stale and stifling, and reeked of bilge water.

It was a dim, foul cavern, littered with the mildewed remnants of former cargoes—decaying sacks, odds and ends of dunnage, greasy filth that had once been coprah. His first step dislodged a rat, which fled squeaking, rousing a horde of others that squeaked, too, and scurried in every direction.

Gathering his tools together he deliberated as to the place he should choose. It mattered very little where, so long as he had enough light to see by—so long as it was not too high. Brandeis was a quick-witted fellow and a thorough seaman, the kind of man to be rushing down with sheet-lead and ideas. The lower the better then, in order that every drop might count. Here was as good a place as any, here at the turn of the knees. The inner skin had to come off first, of course, but that would be easy. One-inch boards, probably; at the most, one and a half, sheathing the hold and protecting the thicker sides of the ship.

Matt got vigorously to work, ripping off a big patch of the inner skin and laying open beyond the real object of attack. The next step required more delicate methods—more care and skill. One fissure, however small, in the outer planking might admit so fierce a gush of water that the task would have to be re-begun elsewhere with all its attendant delay. But there was no time for delay—not an instant. Above him was the unlocked door—the open hatch—urging him to feverish haste.

He marked a good-sized square on the planking,

mindful that the copper outside would help to check the inflow, and set to paring the wood away as evenly as he could with the chisel. It was Oregon pine, and came off in bright, clean shavings, sticky with gum. He dug deeper and deeper; the square sank into the yellow timber; he was as assiduous as ever, though the effort became harder to keep the surface flat and uniform. He was dripping with sweat; the ax was heavy and extremely awkward to hold, cramping his right hand and annoying him with its cumbersome handle. But he persevered, regardless of difficulties, regardless of his aching back and tortured muscles—of the stinging, blinding sweat; paring, paring, paring at the yellow wood till it grew damp to the touch, till it oozed and trickled, till it hissed with tiny streams that squirted into his face.

Dropping the chisel, he ran his hand down the ax-handle, gripped, and aiming the blunt end of the ax at the aperture let fly with all his strength.

There was a flash of greenish water, a stupefying roar, a blow in his chest that hurled him sprawling backwards, drenched, confused, almost senseless. Even at that depth the water was under a colossal pressure; it was as though a geyser had opened in the ship's side; the stream ran solid for six or seven feet, curved, and burst. Matt staggered up and regarded it with awe, dizzily, trying to collect his bewildered senses. Good God, how would the pumps ever cope with it! The whole ocean was pouring

in; it did not seem she could last an hour. He ought to have been pleased, but the sight was too daunting, too terrible. He had to choke back the instinct to cry for help, to scramble on deck, shouting the alarm as he went. It was in a sort of horror that he stood there and did nothing—that he watched the green, transparent serpent striking at their lives.

By degrees he recovered some composure; collected the tools and flung them into the blackest recesses of the hold so that they might not rise in judgment against him—for he knew the short shrift he would get were the act brought home to him.—He drew himself up the hatch, caught the coaming, and with a sailor's alertness sprang out on the trade-room floor, where, trailing water like a spaniel, he hurriedly closed the cover, stamping it into place with his feet. Then with unspeakable relief, he went to the door, listened, opened it a few inches, and peeped cautiously into the passageway.

He looked straight into Chris' eyes. She was in their cabin, leaning against the bunks, and cloaking with the book in her hand the duty she must have assumed of protecting him from interference. She started and turned pale as she beheld him, stifling an exclamation, and signaling him to hurry across. He did so at a bound, closing the cabin door behind him, putting his back to it like a hunted man.

"Get me some dry clothes quick," he panted. "The schooner's done for—I've put a hole in her you could shove your two fists through!"

CHAPTER XXII

BRANDEIS VS. THE PACIFIC OCEAN

THE leak was not reported till supper-time, when Krantz broke in on the party like a whirlwind. To Matt it was a reprieve at the gallows' foot, for he could feel how sluggishly the little vessel rose to the swell, and how she labored with the increasing weight of water in her hold. The uproar that ensued was as welcome to him as it was dismaying to the galvanized mate and to the pallid, stuttering Schwartz. Brandeis was on deck in a moment, bawling orders in a voice like a bull; Schwartz behind him, as white as a corpse; Krantz next, his whiskers flying, and his heavy tread resounding as he stumbled forward to call all hands.

Chris and Matt remained out of harm's way with their half-finished supper before them, whispering in undertones and following as best they could all that was taking place on deck. No criminals ever gazed at each other more guiltily. The fat was now in the fire with a vengeance. Everything hung on Brandeis' decision, and they waited for it with their hearts in their mouths. His first order was to put the ship on the wind, and heel her over on the port tack.

"That's to see if he can't raise the leak out of water," said Matt. "Good for Brandeis, though he will find it won't help much!" With the aid of a dish of sliced beets he explained the manœuver to Chris, so that she was not at all astonished when the mate reversed his tactics, went about, and put the *Esmeralda* over on the starboard tack. "A good seaman, that fellow," Matt commented approvingly. "Only the trouble isn't where he hopes it is." Then the pump began to clank and the sheets were eased as the vessel seemed to be laid again on her original course. "Back where we started," said Matt.

On deck, in the glow of a fiery sunset, they found everything in confusion—a wild scene, tinged like a picture with the crimsoning west. Naked to the waist, a couple of men were working the handspikes of the pump, which was hoarsely flooding the scuppers. The canvas covers had been cut from the whale-boat, and beside it, in a little heap, Yonida and Fusi were stacking provisions, and with a tin saucepan were filling a pair of breakers from the water-butt. The main-hatch was open, gaping to the sky, and within its depths could be heard a wicked, gurgling sound, swishing to and fro with the roll of the ship. At the break of the poop, and showing that Brandeis had at last discovered the source of danger, was the mate himself, vociferously directing the efforts to draw a trysail over the leak and up on the opposite side.

A bellowing command brought Matt to the task,

and a second later he was striving with the rest, and as energetically busy to accomplish the impossible; for he knew the hole was too near the keelson to be likely to suck—he had cut it there for that very reason—but he worked with a will, nevertheless, glad to elude suspicion by an appearance of zeal, and gladder still at the murmurs about him, which, although in German, plainly implied hopelessness and failure.

Brandeis' repeated examinations of the hold, from which he emerged like a drowned rat, appeared to show that the water was gaining on them; though Matt was not half as sure that the confounded trysail was not checking the leak to some degree. After an hour of fiddle-faddling with it, the ends were lashed fast and attention was diverted to rigging a block and tackle over the hatch and attaching a barrel that could be lowered, tilted, hoisted out full, and spilled over the lee-bulwarks like a giant baler—a laborious operation, and, to Matt's idea, clumsy and ineffectual. Relays were appointed both for this and the pump, and a back-breaking routine was inaugurated that continued without intermission as the night advanced.

Matt snatched an opportunity to tell Chris to keep a sharp watch on the binnacle compass. The *Esmeralda's* course was W. S. W., and he asked her to warn him in case it were altered by even a point. To have it altered was his one consuming desire, for it meant the culmination of his plan, and the shortening of those dreaded hours in the whaler. Were

the schooner laid for the nearest land she might be kept afloat to reach it, sparing them an ordeal Matt had experienced before.

All that night as he bent at the hand-spikes, or pulled on that hellish tackle, or dropped utterly spent as the other shift replaced the one to which he belonged, he was unrewarded by the news that would have consoled him for all his suffering. Though the ship seemed heavier than before, and the darkening faces of the crew showed how the unequal battle was going against them, she was not allowed to swerve an inch from her prescribed course. Half sinking as she was, Brandeis kept her at it, with no weakening of his resolve to drown her under rather than turn aside. Schwartz was of less heroic stuff; he pleaded, he argued, he wept—beat the air and stamped in a frenzy of expostulation. If anything were needed to show who was the real master aboard, it was this conflict of the ostensible captain with a mate who roughly ordered him back to work.

At midnight, after another stormy altercation between the two, Schwartz seemed to win a grudging consent to get the wireless into operation. A slender, pointed steel pole was run aloft; Herman installed his apparatus at the foot of the foremast, and with no pretensions of secrecy, and as oblivious of Matt as he was of the rest of the crew, calmly harnessed himself to the wires. The increasing enmity between Brandeis and Schwartz grew to a white heat as both

struggled to dictate the first message. There was another fierce dispute of which Matt never knew the outcome, for he was called aft to take his twenty-minute spell at the pump; but it must have gone in the mate's favor, for the main-boom remained guyed out and there was no change in the *Esmeralda's* course.

Thus the night passed, and by morning it was plain the ship was doomed. She was submerged to the channels, and had a sickening, undecided movement as she sank in the trough of the sea. The men looked at one another, wondering each time if she would ever rise again, or simply founder then and there and go down like a stone. Brandeis had the whaler cleared, provisioned and lowered, and ordering Chris into it, as well as one of the hands, caused the boat to be towed in the schooner's wake. It was a tragic parting for husband and wife, and took place with a suddenness for which they were utterly unprepared. Matt, sodden with fatigue and so worn out that he could scarcely stand, was thankful to see Chris safe, though he wondered whether they might ever meet again on this side of eternity. On his spell off he would wave his hand to her, and after she had waved back he would collapse like a dead man until roused by the relentless mate.

The acquiescence of the crew filled him with amazement and a bitter, mounting anger. He tried to instil into them something of his own fury; pointed

and made signs at the boat; urged them to mutiny, to get away before the ship sank under them. But they listened unmoved, though not without a strained, hungry expression. Life is sweet, and there it was towing a hundred feet behind them, while Brandeis with no weapon but his strident voice held them to a coffin. Their obedience was indeed surprising; no seaman Matt had ever known could have been so patient; he shook his fist in their faces.

Neither of the Japanese could be spared to make breakfast, but some cans of meat were opened and biscuits served out, as well as a niggardly allowance of schnapps. It put fresh heart in the jaded specters as they lay half-naked about the deck, wolfing the food and almost fighting for the liquor. It provoked, too, the first outbreak against Brandeis; muttered growling and complaining suddenly flamed up, and was not extinguished until a second round of schnapps was reluctantly doled out. But with that they seemed appeased, and went back to work with the same doggedness they had shown throughout. Matt, who had thought the men were at last asserting themselves, was cruelly disappointed. Even Schwartz, the most vehement of them, slunk along with the rest and submitted like a lamb to the hectoring, driving mate.

By nine o'clock land was sighted on the port bow, but it caused no relaxation of the killing routine, nor any change in the ship's course. Matt watched

it with an exasperation not to be described. Over there was safety; over there, not fifteen miles away, was the end of all their troubles—white beaches, palms, people, law, security. Yet they must stick like flies on a sieve at the behest of that infernal Brandeis. Matt was beside himself; he raved and swore; had he been alone—had he not been withheld by the thought of Chris—he would have got his revolver and brought the thing to a head.

But no one paid any attention to him, though if he had fallen behind or shirked he knew he would have fared badly. So he kept at it till his arms seemed wrenched from their sockets, till his heart was ready to burst—in a blind, dizzy agony to hold his own with his companions. At intervals the wireless clicked and buzzed; at once, at some message it caught from space, there was much congratulation and handshaking, and even a thin cheer.

The ship was settling fast; at every lurch Matt expected her to founder; she sickened in the depths of the swell, quivered, and threatened to rise no more. Never was there a gladder sound than Brandeis' order to leave her before she left them.

The whaler was drawn up to her quarter, and a hurried descent made into her, the first comers seizing the oars and preparing to back away, in case the *Esmeralda* suddenly went down. It was very coolly done, without panic or disorder; and they pulled clear of the sinking ship with deliberate strokes, Brandeis at the helm nonchalantly smoking

a cigar. Matt had been allotted a place beside Chris in the stern, and though they greeted each other quietly and tried to smile, it was to conceal an emotion so overwhelming, so holy in its tenderness, relief and joy, that it was as if they had emerged from death together and had met again beyond the grave.

Instead of making sail and setting a course, Brandeis unshipped his tiller and allowed the boat to bob as she pleased, while a box of Havanas was passed along from man to man, and Yonida, amidst hilarious acclamations, opened bottle after bottle of champagne. Such a jollification in mid-ocean seemed the act of lunatics. Some refreshment might have been advisable, but here was every one getting cheerfully tipsy, with champagne of all things, and grabbing at the bottles like people at a ball-supper! The Trades had been freshening for the last few days, and the most elementary prudence dictated that not a minute should be lost in determining the bearings of the nearest land, and striving to reach it while the weather was good. Yet the popping of corks continued unabated; the glasses fizzled and foamed; and they might all have been in Sydney Harbor for any thought that was given to their real situation.

Matt drank his share, however, and puffed at his cigar with a heavenly enjoyment that did not prevent him from being also very perplexed and anxious. Why did they drift there and do nothing?

How could they be so inconceivably reckless? His fingers itched for the chart that bulged in Brandeis' jumper. He longed for the command to step the mast. The mate half stood up in the stern-sheets as though at last to give it, but instead of an order it was a shout, with his hand pointing joyfully to leeward. There was an instant commotion, uproar and cheers—embracings and outcries. Some would have risen, too, but they were roundly ordered down. All faces were turned with the mate's to leeward, the boat rocking until it slopped the gunwales under with the twisting and turning of so many men. Smoke on the lee horizon! A steamer's smoke, dimming the azure with a tiny stain!

CHAPTER XXIII

JOHN MORT

SHE was apparently coming up at great speed; the smoke swelled in volume; soon no longer a stain but a cloud, billowing low and black against the sky. The excitement on the whaler grew intense as a spidery mast could be detected through the murk; then a glint of stack, and a gleam of white that might be awnings or hull. At intervals the whaler dipped in the hollow of the swell, and a green mountain hid their view, but as she was borne up again on the crest the swiftly approaching steamer was ever seen more clearly. She loomed up bigger and bigger; two smoke-stacks became discernible; no, there were three! By George, there were four, in a towering, stupendous, black-vomiting line—a giant of a vessel, with fighting tops to her squat masts, and turrets, sponsons and guns showing above the glistening white of her bow. A man-of-war? What else could she be except one of that superb type, designed to outdistance nine-tenths of the armed ships afloat, or turn, if she wished, a volcano of destruction; a colossus of twelve or fourteen thousand tons, able at reduced speed to encircle the globe, and return

whence she had started with coal still to spare in her Brobdingnagian bunkers.

Matt watched her with parted lips, and straining, fascinated eyes. Was it she, then, who had called up the *Esmeralda* night after night? Was this an ocean rendezvous, and the explanation of Brandeis' singular backwardness to lay the whaler on a course? Was this the reason of the cheers, the elation displayed on every side, the absence of any attempt to signal or to make their distress known? It was no chance meeting assuredly, but a prearranged tryst in the waste of the limitless sea. The thought, the growing conviction—were not without alarm; but how could any private individual own such a leviathan? Why, many a government of importance had not the peer of this magnificent vessel that was racing toward them under forced draught, and with all the power of her mighty engines.

As she drew nearer, sparkling with white and steel, she offered a spectacle that stirred the heart. The water flashed at her stem as she cut it asunder and tossed it aside in a rainbow spray; her decks rose, tier upon tier, alive with men; her long, slender guns, protruding from the ports, were backed with human faces; on the lofty bridge were two officers in uniform, the one standing motionless beside the steersman, the other pacing to and fro, occasionally stopping to use his glass.

Suddenly the throb of her engines ceased, and she was gliding toward the whale-boat under no other

impetus but her vast bulk. Shrill whistles sounded; white-clothed sailors were seen running; and, as though by magic, the starboard gangway was lowered, its base churning the water, or rising high above it as the ship rolled in the seaway. At this Brandeis ordered his men to their oars, and, hugging his tiller and swaying with every stroke, headed the whaler for the man-of-war's quarter. It might have been one of her own boats from the swing and precision with which it was brought alongside, the men elevating their oars in unison at the word of command, and old Krantz in the bow, smartly ready with his boat-hook. A couple of seamen jumped out and, oblivious of the water that sometimes drenched them to the waist, assisted Brandeis, Schwartz, Chris and Matt to escape a similar wetting and reach the security of the upper steps.

At the head of the gangway, as the boat was cast off and all the survivors of the schooner crowded up, they were met by a burly officer, who grinned affably, and shook each one of them by the hand. As Matt and Chris passed to the quarter-deck beyond, the former raised his cap to a group of officers, who returned the salute with naval stiffness. It was a moment of some embarrassment—to stand there with no home under the sun save that strange deck, and to know they were dependent on the charity of those disdainful observers who gave no sign of welcoming them.

But an instant later they were accosted by a

young man, also in uniform, who, advancing hurriedly, bowed and, in broken English, said: "Beg pardon, instructed by captain, follow me, please be so kind." On trying to make friends with the young man as he led them toward the companion, he remarked with faultless politeness: "Instructed by captain, no communication is possible, please be so kind."

Guiding them down the stairway to the deck beneath he led them along a passageway to a cabin, into which he ushered them with this concluding statement: "Instructed by captain, you are here to remain, please be so kind." With that he saluted, clicked his heels with Teutonic formality, and departed—presumably "instructed by captain" to report their incarceration.

It was without doubt an officer's cabin, and was prettily decorated with photographs, fans, shells, cotillion favors and other trifling mementos with which a man surrounds himself when he makes the sea his profession and lives the life of a wanderer. The inevitable mother, and the inevitable wife or sweetheart, were in specially embellished frames, holding the place of honor among the silver-backed toilet articles and what not on the mahogany chest of drawers. It was a very reassuring little cabin, breathing of affection, and simple, honest, manly tastes; and the pair, thus oddly imprisoned in it, felt a lessening of their tremors, and laughed at the sight of themselves in the glass.

"They ought to be afraid of us," exclaimed Chris, with saucy confidence, twining her arms about Matt's neck and studying the effect. "I look like the widow of an organ-grinder on the bread-line; and by the time I've combed your hair a bit, you might pass as a Siberian exile who had escaped in a garbage can!"

It may seem incredible that they could be so gay, and find amusement in a situation fraught with unknown perils; but when you have faced death and held it for hours at bay, the reaction is intoxicating; and to realize you are actually alive is a joy unspeakable. Before they could come back to earth, or rather to some consideration of this enigmatical vessel and its enigmatical connection with Brandeis, Schwartz and the mysterious *Esmeralda,* the young officer had returned, and stood blinking at them ceremoniously in the doorway.

"Instructed by captain your presence is requested, please be so kind," he said, addressing Matt. As Chris rose also she was told to stay behind.

"Instructed by captain, no, no, please be so kind," exclaimed the young officer, barring her away. "Instructed by captain, the gentleman only will follow me, please be so kind!"

It was not without hesitation that Matt obeyed. He felt a certain chilling of the confidence that had animated him before. The young officer's tone was masterful in spite of the punctiliousness of his words, and carried with it a disquieting authority.

It was hardly what castaways might expect on the man-of-war that had rescued them. One looked for more warmth, more good-will—some sympathy and friendliness. Matt was very much disturbed, and the farewell glance he exchanged with Chris was troubled indeed.

The young man led him through various passages, and finally brought him to what was evidently the ship's wardroom. Here, seated about the head of the table, were five oldish, grave-looking officers in undress uniform. One, white-haired, dignified and somewhat bald, wore the insignia of a rear admiral, and alone of the little party spoke as Matt entered and bowed.

"Good day," he said curtly in fair English, motioning Matt to come nearer and dismissing his companion with a wave of the hand. "We would like to talk with you, sir."

"I'm at your service," returned Matt, advancing and drawing himself up very straight, as no offer was made to give him a seat. "May I take the liberty of asking the name of this ship, and her nationality?"

The old admiral stared at him frozenly.

"It is I who will ask the questions," he rasped out, "and you will be good enough to answer them. Let me say directly that evasions will be useless, and vat we want is the truth." He uttered the last words with a sort of snarl, which was taken up by the others in an angry murmur. The undisguised

hostility of the whole five affected Matt disagreeably. He might have been a recaptured convict confronting a board of prison directors. There was the same pitilessness, the same air of severity and autocratic power.

"I am an American citizen," said Matt, with spirit. "I've committed no crime, and I warn you that the consequences will be serious if you interfere with me."

The five bristled at this defiance. One of them, with eye-glasses and the bearing of a schoolmaster, folded his arms, and regarded Matt superciliously.

"We are not discussing international law," sneered the admiral. "Might is right, as you say in English. Our patience with you is exhausted. You will tell us vare is a certain individual, or else we make you."

"*Ja,* or else ve make you," added the man with eye-glasses, staring formidably.

John Mort! So it was he they were after? This ship, these officers, the rendezvous in mid-ocean—all were part and parcel of the same extraordinary business. In spite of his bold front Matt quailed inwardly; beads of sweat started on his forehead; he felt like a man on the eve of execution.

"I don't know what you mean," he said at last. "An individual? What individual?"

"We're not here to waste time with such brepari-cation," returned the admiral, accentuating every word with a rap of his knuckles on the table—large,

"We would like to talk with you, sir"

misshapen knuckles, swollen with gout. "You know very well who it is we want, though what you do not apprehend is our determination to extort the truth. We are not milksops like those others, who failed so wretchedly in America. We will have the truth if we have to take your skin with it. Vat is your answer to that, Mistaire Broughton?"

"That I am an American citizen," retorted Matt in an unflinching voice. "You are proclaiming yourself a pirate, and outside the law of nations. You can not frighten me, sir. You are a naval officer, and know as well as I do the enormity of such threats, and that it will break you, admiral or not, if you should dare to lay a finger on me."

"That is beside the point," exploded the admiral, reddening furiously. "Who I am, or what I am, is no goncern of yours. Yes or no, young man, and trifle with me no longer." Then, unrolling a chart, he went on: "Gome here, and show us that island vare it is."

Matt stood immovable.

"I can't," he declared. "I don't know what you mean. Island? What island?"

His affectation of ignorance exasperated the five officers, who, not deigning to reply, began to take counsel with one another in low, fierce undertones. Occasionally a glance would be shot at him of such malevolence and anger that he trembled for the outcome. They seemed to be still debating, when, in answer to a signal he had not perceived, a file of sea-

men marched in and saluted with the excessive humility peculiar to German ships-of-war. Of the nine or ten composing the little party the majority were petty officers—grizzled, bearded, weather-beaten men. At a guttural command they closed about Matt; and one, a strapping fellow with a scar across his cheek, suddenly caught him round the waist.

To resist was the act of a madman, but Matt's brain was whirling, and his pent-up rage burst all bounds. With a wrestler's trick he bent down, carrying his antagonist over his head, and crashing him to the deck like a sack of oats. In an instant he was hitting out with his fists, indiscriminately, crazily, a jaw here, a surly eye there, smash, smash, smash, with blood streaming, blows and yells in return, and a rush that sent him under, burying him in a human avalanche. Had it not been for the officers his life would have been crushed out of him, but they darted into the thick of the mêlée, restoring order like so many policemen at a street fight.

Suddenly in the midst of the hubbub a hush fell; officers and men might have been struck by lightning, so instantaneous was the change, the silence, the awe expressed on every face. Matt, getting up and following their gaze, perceived an old man, gaunt and very pale, standing in the doorway, regarding the scene with a peculiar fixity. He was in a blue dressing-gown and looked ill and broken, as though just risen from a sick-bed; but his eyes be-

lied his bodily weakness, gleaming like coals beneath his straggling white brows. Matt had a curious shock of recognition; where had he seen that benign old face, so hazily familiar, like that of some half-forgotten friend of his childhood.

The old man's voice was sharp and tremulously impassioned as he advanced slowly into the wardroom and addressed the officers. Reproof, indignation, and anger were written on every feature. He cut short their explanations, indicating Matt with a quivering gesture, and blazing forth anew as they seemed to be palliating their harsh usage. He moved over to Matt and put one arm protectingly about him.

"Disgraceful," he said in singularly pure English, though with the accent of a foreigner, turning from the cringing officers. "They would have it that I was too ill to be disturbed and have shamed me by their treatment of you. Will you spare me a few minutes' conversation in my cabin?" he then added. "Time is precious, and I feel sure we can come to an agreement more quickly than the gentlemen here anticipate."

Matt acceded willingly, though wondering and mystified. He was as shaky as the old man, and was glad to hold to the arm the latter proffered him. Together, side by side, they made their way to the door, which was deferentially opened for them, every one standing to attention with his hand at the salute. Beyond, at the far end of the passageway

and apparently in the extreme stern of the ship, a small group of servants in livery were gathered, who were similarly stricken to statues at the sight of the pair. Walking unsteadily, more from weakness than the movement of the ship, Matt and his venerable companion supported each other, and at length reached what appeared to be the state cabin.

It was the largest Matt had ever seen afloat, taking in the whole beam of the ship, and was furnished with a luxury undreamed of at sea. Beautiful antique furniture, glowing Oriental rugs, rich dark hangings of faded crimson, slashed with gold—it was like stepping into a mediæval palace or the famed splendors of the Yildiz Kiosk. But mingled with exquisite heirlooms of the past were other objects of aggressive modernity. Beside the carved bedstead, with its piled-up pillows and its disordered sheets, was a night-table, on which were several medicine bottles, a clinical thermometer, an inhaler with an india-rubber bulb, and a thick mass of type-written manuscript.

"You must excuse me if I return to bed," said the old man, whose increasing weariness was becoming painfully apparent. Settling himself in a sitting posture, and drawing the embroidered coverlet over his long, thin legs, he relaxed as though thankful to be at rest. "Sit there," he continued, motioning Matt to take a place on the bed facing him. "Sit there, and tell me why you are so stubborn in refusing what we ask."

Matt wavered, inclined at first to deny everything, but it was difficult—impossible—to lie to this old man, whose courtesy was so disarming.

"Put yourself in my place," Matt replied. "Would you betray the best friend you ever had?"

"Betray!" exclaimed the old man. "Ah, that has been at the root of all our troubles, of all our intolerable delays and vexations. You think, then, our intentions are not for the good of this person to whom you are so loyal?"

"I know what his own wishes are," said Matt boldly.

The old man paused, regarding his companion with an air too kindly to be called critical, yet scrutinizing and keen.

"I will surprise you," he said at last. "My subordinates blundered with the stupidity of most subordinates when entrusted with an affair of immense importance. They could not see that the man who kept one secret was fit to be entrusted with another. It was a decision doubtless too great for them to take, though had it been presented to me as it ought I might have consented. You would not put your friend in our power; we would not put ourselves in yours. So, both in error, this melancholy persecution ensued, amid circumstances more suitable to the Arabian Nights than to a matter of high state. You do not know who I am?"

"No."

"Have you no conjecture?"

"No."

"Well, I suppose the poor fools must be commended for that. Mr. Broughton, my house has trusted you once, and now the head of it will trust you again, knowing that my confidence will be sacred."

Matt nodded.

At this the old man bent forward, and breathed the name of that Emperor-King whose dominions embrace a dozen countries and comprise the fifth of Europe. Here, for obvious reasons, it must be omitted, though in that great cabin it was uttered aloud, and quavered on the lips of the Emperor-King himself.

Matt repeated it with amazement, as a hundred pictures of the man before him recurred to his mind —pictures in magazines and newspapers, in geography-books and school histories. He rose respectfully, and bowed. "Your Majesty," he exclaimed.

"Be seated," commanded the benignant voice. "Yes, I am that personage, who, whatever his faults, deserves the consideration—the compassion of mankind. Now, is it clearer to you who it is I seek?"

"No," returned Matt, with an ill-suppressed agitation. "No, your Majesty."

"I will tell you," said the Emperor-King, hardly less moved, his trembling hands plucking and clutching at the coverlet. "The friend you served with such devotion is—my son!"

That terrible tragedy in which the Crown Prince was supposed to have taken his life came back to Matt in waves of recollection. He remembered the stir it had made, the shock of horror, the profound mystery in which the affair was shrouded. He remembered the speculations as to what had actually happened in that lonely hunting-lodge; some maintaining that the beautiful young baroness had killed herself rather than be forsaken, causing the prince to blow out his own brains from remorse —others, that it had been a double suicide, a death-pact, deliberately conceived and as deliberately executed by the heir to one of the greatest kingdoms of the world.

Matt was dumfounded; he could not utter a word; was it possible, was it conceivable that John Mort was the—?

"You know the story that the world knows," continued the old man. "You know the story I myself believed for thirty-six hours, till—" He hesitated, lowered his voice, and looked about him. "Listen," he went on. "I mean to hide nothing from you. It is true that the young baroness threw caution to the winds and followed the prince there; it is true she shot herself; it is true that my son in his frenzy tried to turn the same pistol against his own breast.

"To face such a scandal seemed impossible; to escape seemed worse. In either event the throne would be shaken to its foundations, and my son's name blackened beyond redemption. He had a valet

named Zeitz—Ludwig Zeitz—one of those faithful simpletons who are sublime in the devotion which our house has always inspired. This fellow, who affected to copy the prince, and was proud beyond measure of a resemblance no one saw but himself, threw himself at my son's feet. He would shoot himself, he said; his body would be mistaken for that of the prince; death atones for everything, and my son, unpursued, might pass the frontiers without detection, and lose his identity in the countless millions beyond.

"His proposal was disregarded; was treated as a gross impertinence; he was roughly silenced and ordered to hold his tongue, while my son, in the midst of his comrades, persisted like a madman in his desire to die. Suddenly there was a report, and they rushed in to find this Zeitz lying beside the woman, with the top of his head blown off. He had dressed himself in my son's clothes; had taken my son's rifle, and had resolved the matter in his own hare-brained way. But at that moment, in their dismayed state, it seemed to my son and his friends the solution of everything. They did not wait to ask how the corpse of the valet could pass the examination that would necessarily follow. My son mounted a horse and fled.

"As I said, the imposture for thirty-six hours was not questioned. But the doctors could not be deceived; the body was unmistakably that of Ludwig

Zeitz. I myself stood before it, as it lay naked on their table, and confirmed their opinion. My feelings toward my son were very bitter; he had dishonored the Imperial house; I exaggerated in my heart, though God knows it was great enough, the harm he had done it and me. With the connivance of the doctors I accepted the imposture. The world had accepted it, and I decided to leave them in ignorance.

"It was not until years afterward—in 1898 when the Empress was taken from me under the most horrible circumstances, that I found in her papers some facts of startling import. Her extravagance, which had been the talk of Europe, and to me a perpetual source of discord—had its origin in a vast debt, incurred in 1890, on which afterward she had been paying excessive interest, as well as steadily diminishing the principal. And the one who had obtained that vast sum was no other than my unhappy son, who had gone to her in his extremity, and had thus acquired the means to hide himself in the uttermost parts of the earth.

"There is nothing the world will not condone nor forget, and in twenty years a new generation arises to whom the scandals of the old are of slight significance. Men, too, are less uncharitable than we believe them. I began to ask myself whether my son might not return; whether, indeed, his act were so irreparable as it had seemed. Was not the reunion of father and son, so long separated, calculated to

soften the hardest? My people love me; I have no need to surround myself with guards and secret agents; as I move among them, often with my little grandchildren on either side, clinging to my hands, my reception is one to touch the heart. I can see eyes moisten; honest faces brighten; everywhere that look of good-will, of affection, not—I am proud to believe—for the old Emperor alone, but for the man he is and has tried to be.

"Surely, I said to myself, they will be with me if I recall my son. The sight of an old father, white-haired and broken, holding out his arms in forgiveness, is one too human, too affecting to be met with scorn. They also will forgive, every father among them, every mother, every son. Then it was I began my search, sending forth agents to every corner of the globe. For years it went on, without the least success, until my special bureau, whose service it was to read every paper printed, learned of you in Manaswan, and seized a clue we were not slow to follow. We were impelled to extraordinary exertions. I sent my Chief of the Secret Police to New York with unlimited powers and unlimited money. He surrounded you with an army of spies, who reported to him, and then to me by cable; everything was done, permissible or sometimes not permissible, to gain from you that information for which I would have given all the life I have left.

"There is the story, Mr. Broughton. I make no offers of reward; I make no threats; both, I ap-

preciate now, were mistaken. I simply ask you—beg you—to tell me where my son is."

For a while Matt remained silent, too dazed to answer.

"I must make a single stipulation," he said at length. "That we land together, alone, you and I—and if your Majesty will permit, my wife—and if your son decides to stay you will promise to respect his wishes."

"He will come," said the Emperor. "My son will not refuse."

Matt thought of Mirovna, and was less positive. He wondered whether he should inform the old man of her existence, but refrained.

"I can do nothing without your Majesty's promise," he said. "The decision must be left to the prince; he must be free to choose—free to stay if he prefers."

"Certainly I promise that," returned the Emperor, with a touch of querulousness. "Compulsion would be worse than wrong; it would be ridiculous. Why do you still hesitate? It is not kind to keep me in suspense."

"I am not hesitating, your Majesty; I am only asking myself whether you may not be mistaken in thinking my friend to be your son."

"Mistaken! How is it possible to be mistaken! That ring he gave you—it was one he always wore. The tenacity you have shown in guarding his name and his story, does it not speak of the most peremp-

tory instructions? The money you spent on his behalf in Sydney, Brisbane, Thursday Island, Tahiti, Guayaquil, San Francisco, was it not invariably in Bank of England notes, whose number accorded with those provided for us by the English officials? Why, for six years, these notes, which we knew came from him, formed the clue which we ceaselessly attempted to follow. Moreover, Mr. Satterlee is positive you recognized the miniature he showed you. Isn't that so?"

"Yes, the resemblance was remarkable."

"My son is now forty-seven years of age. Does that not accord?"

"It does—though he appears somewhat older."

"Is he not a violinist of exceptional talent? It was that reference in the newspaper accounts printed of you, which first attracted our attention."

"Again you are right—though I would not call it talent, but genius."

"Look at this photograph—almost the last taken of him. Have you still any doubts?"

"No, it is John Mort."

"John Mort?"

"That is the name by which I have known him."

"Mort, you say? Mort! Ah, how like him to choose such a name! Tell me of him; describe him to me; I want to know everything—everything."

"But who was the gentleman who offered me a hundred thousand dollars in Manaswan?"

"A celebrated criminal lawyer of New York, whom Frankasch, my Chief of the Secret Police, retained among others to assist him. A very clever, able man, who proved himself invaluable."

"And the schooner, the *Esmeralda*—how was it contrived to have her timed to meet me?"

"She had been bought from the first, and was manned by a special detail of picked naval officers. Frankasch suspected you would return to San Francisco, for that is the gateway to the Pacific, and it became a part of his plan to get you there as soon as he discovered he could not bribe you. The vessel lay there for over four months, while no efforts were spared to make it impossible for you to remain in eastern America. Admiral von Tripwitz —to you, Brandeis—spoke too little English, and therefore, for that as well as other reasons, it seemed wiser to have as nominal commander Agent Schwartz, of the Secret Service."

"And how were those jewelers—Snood and Hargreaves—induced to treat me as they did?"

"Oh, that was simple. They were shown long official cablegrams from Europe, vouched for by our consul, warning them that the ring had been stolen. All they required was to be indemnified against a possible suit-at-law, as well as to have returned to them the money originally advanced you on the ring. When these matters were settled to their satisfaction, and a substantial bond given, they made no difficulty in surrendering the ring to the

consulate. Your letter, and then your telegram, were handed to the consul, who, on the telegraphed orders of Frankasch, replied to you as he was directed. Of course, he knew nothing; he merely obeyed orders. But you must not think our surveillance was limited to San Francisco. The whole western coast from Vancouver to San Diego and Mazatlan, was under a constant watch."

"Your Majesty will, of course, give directions that Snood and Hargreaves are undeceived? It would not be fair that I should remain in their estimation—a thief."

"No, no, no, you do not understand, Mr. Broughton. Frankasch never accused you of theft. It suited his purpose to make you out innocent—a sailor who had picked up the ring for a trifle, for he would have been glad had you brought suit against the jewelers in order to force from you the particulars of how you came into possession of the ring. It was even arranged to guide you to a lawyer who should betray your confidence! Shameful, yes—detestable—but were we not justified?"

Matt paused, trying to grasp the immensity of the conspiracy of which he had been the victim. What tens of thousands had been lavished, what care and skill had been employed—to close the net about him! Every western seaport watched; New York the headquarters of a veritable general of detectives; the *Esmeralda* in ambush with her picked crew—on what a gigantic scale it all had been prepared, with

what secrecy and thoroughness! And more stirring even than this was the thought of John Mort, now revealed as a prince of Imperial blood, and soon perhaps to be a king, an emperor, with armies, fleets, palaces—salvos of artillery as he moved in state. John Mort! With his wild past, his self-imposed exile, his tragically divided life—what a poignant figure, pacing the sands of his lonely island, and seeing, not the combers thundering against the coral nor the palms bending in the wind, but that far-off lodge in the mountains of his native land and the blood trickling from a woman's breast!

But the old man did not suffer this reverie to continue. He had unrolled a chart, and had flattened it out, not without difficulty, on the bed. Painfully excited, with his emaciated hands shaking and his voice senile and broken, he besought Matt to show him the spot where his son was.

"There," said Matt, running his finger over the sheet to a speck marked "Reef e. d." "There, your Majesty!"

The chart bore a number of little crosses roughly penciled and strung together, each with its date—the ship's course, plotted from day to day. Matt regarded the last cross carefully, and in reply to a question estimated that Lotoalofa was some five degrees to the eastward and about a degree and a half south of their present position.

The old Emperor bowed his head over the chart and seemed to be struggling with a terrible emotion.

Then he looked up, his face white and drawn, as though he were on the point of fainting. But he silenced Matt's exclamation with a gesture. "Call Admiral von Todloben," he gasped, falling back on his pillows. "I must instruct him to alter the ship's course at once."

CHAPTER XXIV

LOTOALOFA

BY dusk the next day wind and sea had fallen to a profound calm; the masthead vanes drooped; the ship might have been steaming over a summer lake. In her sweltering depths her engines, pressed as they had never been pressed before, throbbed hoarsely, with the needle of every gage shivering at the zenith. Her decks seemed to arch and fall back at each mighty revolution; the great stacks darkened the evening sky with the deeper black of smoke, belching forth a four-fold torrent, sometimes lit by a fury of sparks, or high-leaping tongues of flame. The enormous hull, urged to the limit of her speed, rolled up before her a wide line of broken water, gleaming with phosphorescence as though turned to liquid gold, and crisply splashing in an unending cadence.

Lotoalofa was in sight, a straggling row of dots to those on the bridge; surf, beaches, palms and shining shadowy lagoon to the watchers in the foretop. Gathered on the bridge, and surrounding the venerable monarch who reclined in a deck-chair, was the little party privileged to be with him—Matt, with binoculars to his eyes, standing beside stout

old Von Todloben, and overtopping him by a head; Chris, in an officer's cloak, seated on the elongated end of the Emperor's chair, a position of honor to which she had been specially called; Brandeis, now Von Tripwitz, in a borrowed, ill-fitting uniform, punctiliously remaining aloof from the frequent consultations; Captain Count Hoyos, the nominal commander of the ship, a dark, fine-looking man of artistocratic appearance; the navigating officer, an eager, guttural, energetic person; and last of all Schwartz, who sat by himself on a camp-stool, very humbly and respectfully, as though much overcome at being in such exalted company.

As night closed in, an animated discussion took place, with Matt in the center of the group, and for the moment the most important individual there—for it turned on him whether or not the vessel was to hold her position till morning, or venture the entrance of the lagoon by moonlight. Matt's own counsel was for caution, for the man-of-war drew twenty-six feet of water; and while he felt reasonably sure of piloting her safely through the northern channel (there was another, the western channel, deeper but more tortuous), he shrank from assuming so great a responsibility in the dark. Twenty-six feet made an immense draught; a cloud across the moon might easily imperil the ship; the lagoon was thick with coral patches, any one of which might pierce her plates. Admiral Von Todloben

sided with Matt, as did the captain and the navigating lieutenant. But the old Emperor, lying in the deck-chair, could not be made to appreciate the risk; he reiterated his request to have the ship taken in at once; from suave he became impatient, and the strain of suspense he was under showed itself in an outburst that cowed all but Matt into a sullen submission.

"Your Majesty is unwise," he said bluntly, waiting till the old man had recovered his sorely shaken composure. "If you will permit me to suggest it, why not take one of the steam pinnaces and let the ship hold off till dawn?"

This simple expedient was hotly resisted by the officers, to whom the personal security of the Emperor was of almost sacred importance; but the latter was more than pleased with the idea, and welcomed it enthusiastically. He scouted all objections and seemed to put aside his bodily weakness—rising in their midst, and astonishing every one by his unexpected vigor as he ordered the pinnace to be made ready. After that there were no more protests; one may argue with a sick man on his couch, but on his feet the Emperor was enhaloed by an authority none dared question. The bo'sun's whistle piped; men and officers came running to their stations; the winches rent the air with their irritating clack. While the pinnace was being hoisted out and steam raised in her boiler, the warship's searchlight began

to flash its dazzling and spreading beam; and as though in answer a spot of light glimmered on the horizon like a red-hot coal. It was a primitive beacon, reared and brightly burning on the beach of the island, to help the ship keep her position and ride out the night without danger.

Such concern for strangers surprised Matt and made him wonder. In his whole previous experience but three vessels had ever entered the lagoon, and John Mort had resented their intrusion and shortened their stay with the utmost bitterness—refusing them water and firewood, banning any intercourse, and disputing, rifle in hand, their right to land. In contrast, this friendly beacon struck Matt as odd indeed, and at variance with everything he remembered. But he had little time to give to such reflections, for the pinnace was soon ready, and they descended the gangway and took their places in her cock-pit—the Emperor, Chris and Von Todloben, with himself at the tiller.

Although the island seemed near, it was an hour before they reached the edge of the breakers, and skirted them, groping for the entrance. The night was pitch-black; the hiss and rumble of the surf was Matt's only guide; in his fear of overshooting the pass he kept the pinnace in so close that she was caught in the backwash, occasionally rolling her gunwales under. The launch was a heavy little tub, and, for all her noise, made very poor speed. When the moon finally rose, and showed them the low,

Chris was seated on the end of the Emperor's chair

whitened shores of the island, densely fringed with palms, Matt, as he picked up his landmarks, was annoyed to find his pains had gone for nothing, for he was still a good six miles from the break in the reef.

It was another hour before they turned into it, and opened the lagoon beyond. The beauty of that vast lake in the moonlight hushed every mouth. Not a breath stirred on it; its silvery expanse stretched away unbroken, unruffled to the rim that held it virgin from the sea. There it lay within its cup of coral, ineffably peaceful, mirroring the moon. Far over the water were the lights of a settlement, sparkling like fireflies among the trees. The old Emperor drew his cloak more closely about him, though none but he was conscious of any chill, and stirred restlessly, as if in the throes of an uncontrollable impatience. His silence had the weight of a command; no one spoke; the bustling launch, throwing up on either side a ripple of phosphorescence, alone disturbed the stillness.

The settlement, embowered in palms, grew more distinct; roofs showed, coral walls, drawn-up canoes, the long stone pier—all touched with the magic of the tropic night. How familiar it was—how beautiful! To Matt it was a homecoming; he inhaled with delight the scent of frangipani and pandanus blossom wafted over the lagoon; his hand clasped his wife's in boyish delight.

The end of the pier was clustered with natives,

who stood waiting without a sound for the boat to approach. It made a bumpy landing at the stone steps, the boat-hooks scraping the slimy sides of the pier and bringing it slowly to rest. Matt leaped out first, crying "Talofa" right and left, and was mobbed in the throng of half-naked humanity that surged about him, calling and repeating his name with unrestrained joy. What nose-rubbing! What excitement! What a rush and jostle of kanaka affection! But what was Peau saying? Peau, grave and dignified in even that press, with his chiefly carriage and earnest eyes? To be prepared for evil tidings! What did he mean? Where was the chief? What was all this about the hand of God?

"Oifea le alíi?" he asked again, in an agony of apprehension. *"Séi faamatala mai le uinga o lau puapuanga. Po ua ngasengase le ona, po—?"*

"Ua maliu, Matthew!"

"Maliu?"

The words went through his heart like a knife; for a moment he could not speak; it was the Emperor, clutching at his sleeve, who roused his stricken faculties.

"Where is he?" quavered the old man. "Why is he not here?"

Matt did not know how to answer.

"Ma le tamaitái sóo?" he inquired of Peau, beset with a fresh dread.

"Aue, ua maliu fói, Matthew. Na ia fasiotia e lona lava lima ma le fana faataamilo."

"Where is he?" reiterated that quavering voice.

"His Majesty addresses you," added Von Todloben, scandalized at the American's backwardness.

Matt could hardly say it. He looked helplessly from the one to the other.

"He is dead," he said at last.

The old man tottered and would have fallen, had not Matt sustained him. He was assisted to an upturned canoe, where he sat, half fainting, supported by Von Todloben. Here, in a space left by the natives, who had withdrawn respectfully to a little distance, he gradually rallied. He beckoned Matt to him, and in a tone strangely colorless and so low it was almost a whisper, asked: "When did it happen?"

"He tells me it was about four months ago," returned Matt. "It was a fever; he was hardly ill two days, though for some time before he had suffered attacks of pain; he passed away suddenly, and was conscious and without any thought he was in danger till an hour before the end."

"And did he leave no word, no letter?"

Matt translated the question to Peau.

"No, Excellency," replied the latter in Samoan. "Though I asked him for one in our protection, lest we be accused of his death. But he answered mockingly he did not intend to die, and was not Mirovna there, besides, to speak for us?"

Matt repeated this with some omissions. Then determining to conceal nothing, he went on: "He

was not alone, your Majesty; he had with him here a young and beautiful woman, who loved him devotedly, and who killed herself on his grave. He called her Mirovna . . . a very beautiful woman. They are buried side by side . . . ."

The old man listened unmoved. "It is not for me to judge her," he said, and with this comment, never referred to Mirovna again, remaining silent for a long while, and sunk in a sort of stupor. At last he rose unsteadily to his feet and asked to be taken to the grave. "It is the end of my long journey," he said. "The end of many, many things."

The little party, guided by Peau, took their way ashore and followed him along the path that led across the narrow width of the island. The moonlight streamed through the palms, outlining on the sandy floor beneath the giant branches that met overhead; here and there a spreading jack-fruit cast a blacker shadow, through which they struggled like men in a cavern; occasionally they passed boggy pits, steaming miasmically, orange trees of penetrating fragrance, groves of bananas, rustling their tattered leaves and grown together in an impenetrable jungle. Soon, however, they emerged from this zone of cultivation, and with the drone of the seaward breakers in their ears found themselves in a barren region, broken in little hillocks, and open to the unshaded brilliancy of the moon.

Here, in a sandy hollow, and unutterably melancholy in their aspect, stood two small wooden

crosses, painted white, surmounting a pair of narrow mounds, side by side.

They stopped and the white men uncovered; Peau, who wore nothing on his glistening, black hair, reverently inclined his head.

"Which is my son's?" asked the Emperor, gazing at the ground.

Peau pointed at the nearest grave.

"The chief sleeps there," he said in native to Matt; and then, with a shudder of recollection: "The stones were wet with Mirovna's blood, and the *fana faataamilo* so clenched in her hand that I could not take it from her—no, Excellency, I could not, and thus it was buried with her, all marveling at the fierceness of her grasp."

The old Emperor had fallen on his knees in prayer with one arm about the cross. It seemed a sacrilege to watch him, though not an eye was dry, and rugged Von Todloben was shaking with sobs. The unceasing moan of the surf, the weirdness and loneliness of the spot, that frail, tragic figure crouching in the moonlight—all affected the little company profoundly. It was a relief to every one when he staggered to his feet, and with pitiable resolution turned away.

Nothing was said; the unspoken wish was obeyed; they slowly retraced their steps, the old man walking apart, unassisted. In this funereal manner they reached the pier, where the Emperor at last broke the oppressive silence.

"And you?" he asked, turning to Matt. "Tell me what I may do for you; tell me how I can reward you?"

Matt did not know what to say; in fact, as he began to realize his own situation, he felt greatly cast down. What, indeed, was to become of him and Chris? To go or to stay appeared equally impossible; here they were with nothing but the clothes they stood in, waifs where they had expected a home and welcome. He did not answer, though perplexity and dismay were evident on his face.

"You are right," continued the Emperor. "It is for me to give—not for you to ask. Would it please you—would it content you—to remain on this island and receive it from me as a gift?"

"Oh, your Majesty, nothing in the world could make me happier."

"Then assemble these savages, and let us inform them that you are now the master."

"It is not necessary, your Majesty; they will believe me when I tell them."

"And I must do more," went on the old man with pathetic earnestness. "That sum once offered you as a bribe and so honorably refused—it must also be yours. I shall send it to you by a vessel, and if then you find this isolation greater than you can bear, my officers will be instructed to take you wherever you wish."

Matt was overwhelmed.

"I should be most glad of the vessel," he said,

after stammering his thanks. "But as for money, what there is here must already be a fortune."

"Accept the one from me and the other from my son," returned the Emperor. "Good-by, my friend, and keep us both in your remembrance, as I, on my part, will ever cherish you in mine."

With another word to Chris, whose hand he bent over and saluted with stately courtesy, he descended into the pinnace and took his place with Von Todloben. The latter looked up and raised his cap; even as he did so the boat was pushed off and the water began to boil under her stern. A moment later she was skimming over the lagoon toward the lights of the man-of-war, now twinkling at the entrance of the pass. Matt and Chris, hand in hand, gazed after her spellbound.

A deprecatory cough brought them back to earth.

"The great house has been prepared for the reception of your Excellencies," said Peau. "And if it be in your high-chief desire, a trifling repast of turtle and *palusami* awaits your condescension."

THE END