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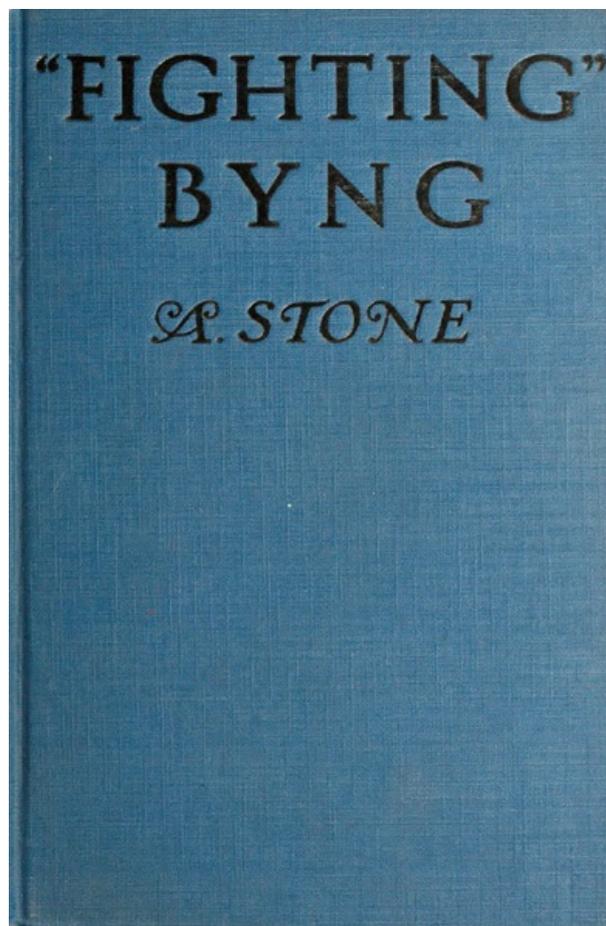
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FIGHTING BYNG: A NOVEL OF MYSTERY, INTRIGUE AND ADVENTURE ***

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FIGHTING BYNG

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Howard carried her in his arms, talking to her as he would to a child.

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FIGHTING BYNG

***A NOVEL OF MYSTERY
INTRIGUE AND ADVENTURE***

By
A. STONE

ILLUSTRATIONS
BY L. PERN BIRD

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To my daughter,
MARGUERITE-MAUD

FIGHTING BYNG

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CHAPTER I

At first sight Howard Byng impressed me as being a cross between a Wild Man of Borneo and a pirate.

He came bounding through the otherwise silent turpentine forest dragged along by a little gray mule, hitched to a sledlike affair, shouting Georgia Cracker profanity easily heard a mile away. Hatless, long-haired, and virgin fuzz-covered face; hickory shirt, flapping patched pants belted with hempen rope threatening to drop at each kangaroo leap of his ample bare feet, describes the picture. The sound was not unlike a hurricane, the careening mule charging toward our camp with his head down, the sled drawn by chain traces often sailing higher than his humped and angry back.

In Georgia nothing equals a scared runaway mule as an excitement-producer. So at least it impressed my surveying gang just about to breakfast under a big mess tent pitched across a faded cart track along the bank of a winding creek. Needless to say we were all amazed at the sulphurous anathemas heaped upon the offending beast. I must confess that some of my men, highly accomplished in the use of verbal explosives, listened with envy.

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From amused interest, however, we soon changed to grave concern. The mule seemed to think that he had the right of way over the old cart track and headed directly for our tent. In three seconds the damage was done. He plunged directly into the outfit, knocked down the center pole and landed on his back. There he lay with feet in the air, kicking and struggling until the wreck of our breakfast, cooking outfit, beds and clothing of eight men, was complete.

Of course, when Howard Byng came flying into us the sentiment was all against him and his gray mule, notwithstanding the new brand of profanity he introduced, for my men were recruited in the North. We had just completed a survey of the Dismal Swamp and had arrived in Georgia full of quinine, malaria and peevishness. But it was our job to give the Forestry Division accurate knowledge of the longleaf pine left in Georgia.

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Things looked squally as I scrambled away from the kicking mule and I eyed his master somewhat ruefully. It was then that I noticed a sign of mental bigness in the youngster. I also noted that he was much larger physically, and more husky than I

had first thought him to be. Even after his long run he wasn't winded, his ample chest accounting for that. He wasn't mad, either, but very much excited. Experience had taught me that a man with his kind of nose seldom gets mad—just fierce. With a litheness and strength surprising he threw up the edge of the tent, dived into the wreck and literally dragged "Jeff Davis" out, continuing meanwhile his complimentary remarks about the perverseness of all mules and "Jeff" in particular.

On four feet again the maddened mule, still feeling himself to be the injured party, kicked viciously with both hind feet at his owner, then started straight across our wrecked home at break-neck speed down the faded cart track.

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"Did you-all ever see such a damn mule?" This question was addressed particularly to me. Even in the excitement the youngster shrewdly discerned that I was in charge. "Let him go; he'll stop. A mule won't go far after you doan want him," he added. Then, for the first time, he noticed how unpopular he was with my husky, malarious eight.

The fellow interested me not a little. I smiled encouragingly, but my main thought was to get the tent in place and a new breakfast cooked so we could get to work.

"I ain't 'sponsible for that there mule, suh, but I reckon I'm goin' to help you-all put the tent back," he said to me in kindly tone of voice. But getting the side remarks of the disgusted men, and especially our big "axe-man," and the cook, who saw more than double work ahead, Byng's eyes opened wide.

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"You kaint help a mule running away. It's bawn in 'em. Anyhow, it won't take long to git the tent up again." He eyed me expectantly and my sympathy went out to him. "I'll do it myself," he added affably.

"Of course it isn't your fault," I replied. "A mule is a mule; that is why he is called by that name."

For a moment I thought the matter would get by amicably, but another flood of profanity from big Jake and aimed directly at the Georgia Cracker brought the tension to the breaking point.

In the code of the turpentine woods it is perfectly proper to swear at a mule no matter who owns it, and a mule expects to be "cussed." But to include the owner, or driver, is an insult that calls for trouble.

Instantly the young stranger stopped his work and stepped back a few paces. There he listened carefully to all that was said, and as long as he could stand it, his steel gray eyes taking on a fire that I well understood. But my men from the North did not grasp the situation. In a voice not so very loud, but plain enough to be heard by all, the Cracker, in a wonderful Southern drawl, began to say something.

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"I reckon I kain't fight you-all all at once, but I'll take you-all one at a time and whup the whole bunch of yer." He then glanced over toward me as though expecting a square deal. I gave him a kindly twinkle of encouragement, but his challenge had the effect of quieting matters for a brief period. Then big Jake, who seemed to be in a particularly bad humor, began to snort and swear again.

Jake had long since elected himself boss bruiser of the party, and without contest. We had been in the Dismal Swamp so long and eaten so much quinine that if he had said he was the devil himself, or any other bandit, all hands would have assented. Now they looked to Jake to prove his claims as a bad man.

Jake, thoroughly confident, quit work and swaggered over toward the Cracker. He still gave vent to most insulting tirades. I felt somehow that Jake was recklessly going against an unknown quantity, but I said nothing. If he was well licked once it might make him a better camp fellow.

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Jake rushed at Byng bellowing like the king bull of a herd, but the Cracker boy stood his ground with chin slightly elevated, his jaws set until a knob showed on the lower angle.

"Yer crazy mule breaks up our camp and spoils our breakfast and now yer want to fight—is dat it?" Jake sneered, his words in purest "hobo."

The Cracker boy glanced at me and seemingly understood how I felt. Nevertheless, he watched Jake with eyes strangely fierce.

"Why don't you say something, yer damn Cracker. They ain't no fight in ye," sneered Jake insultingly. Then reaching out he tore open Byng's hickory shirt, and spat tobacco juice upon his bare skin.

The youngster hadn't raised his hand as yet; he seemed to be waiting for something. His restraint seemed ominous to me.

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Jake emboldened, grabbed him by the shoulder, partly turned and gave him a hunch with his knee which had the effect of unleashing the boy's tremendous energy. As

quick as a flash his great brown fist flew out, landing on Jake's jaw. It was a wallop with an echo that rebounded from the opposite bank of the creek, and Jake hit the ground with a thud.

"Now git up and I'll do it agin," the Cracker boy said confidently.

Jake gained his feet unsteadily, and started forward like a maddened bull. It seemed as though he would surely carry everything before him. But the youngster waited calmly. Perhaps six seconds elapsed before his long reach shot out again. This put the axeman on his hands and knees, with face as white as chalk. As he partly raised, Byng grabbed him by the waist, and, as if lifting a dead dog, tossed him into the creek.

For the first time in months my fever-and-ague crew laughed outright. To see Jake get his quietus from so unexpected a quarter was a tonic in itself. The big bully had been put out by a kid, so to speak, and every one of his mates laughed when the victim waded out of the creek spitting out teeth.

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"Now is they any more of you-all ut wants to fight?" challenged the victor, addressing himself to all present, but they only grinned and looked at Jake sprawling on the grass. I walked over to the Cracker boy.

"What is your name?" I asked, reassuringly.

"My name, suh, is Howard Byng."

"That's a good name. You ought to be called 'Fighting' Byng. Better go and find that mule or you may lose him. We will soon be straightened out here," I added, smiling, also taking closer inventory of the boy. Without further words he started down the old road to recover Jeff Davis and put him back to work.

Jake, having been thoroughly disabled, quit his job and left me short-handed. The next morning I saw Howard Byng in the adjoining wood, with the gray mule drawing the sled. There was a barrel on it. He had been gathering turpentine sap, and sledding it to a "still." He was glad to see me, and at once offered me a chew of dog-leg natural-leaf tobacco.

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"How do you like this kind of work?" I asked, casually.

"Waal—only tolerable, suh," he drawled, taking a liberal chew of the leaf. "But I'm doggoned tired of dis heah country."

"This country is all right—isn't it?"

"Yes, suh," he replied slowly, leaning back against the sap barrel, "I reckon de country's all right, but here lately it seems just lak God made it de las' thing he done and used up what poor stuff he had left."

"I thought Georgia was a pretty good state," I suggested.

"Oh, yes, suh, Georgia is a good enough state, an' I reckon Atlanter, Augusta, an' Savannah are big cities with mighty fine, rich people, but dis heah pa't ain't no good 'tall—do you-all know just what dis yellah land an' swamp heah is good fur?" he asked solemnly, ruefully contemplating his great toe wrapped in a cotton rag.

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"What do you think it is best for?" I asked, standing a few paces away, amused.

"Well, suh, I'll tell yer what it's good for, an' the only thing it is good for, and that is to hold the earth together, that's all," he said with finality. I laughed and asked how he would like to leave, and go to work in the surveying party.

"I'd lak it mighty well, but I reckon you-all ain't got no place for me," he replied, rising eagerly and coming up to where I stood.

"Yes—maybe I can arrange it. That fellow you smashed yesterday has got to leave. The doctor says his jaw is fractured and he must eat soft food. He is not fit to work—he wants to go." Byng's eyes grew large.

"Well, suh, I'm pow'ful sorry. I'm glad I hit him only a little tap, or it might'a killed him. I held back all I could—jest a little tap. An' now you say I can have his job?" he asked, coming closer, his eyes glittering.

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"Yes, if you want it."

"An' you say that fellah has his jaw broke, and the saw-bones says he mus' live on spoon vittles?" he asked, moving away, his head hanging.

"Yes, that's about it—but you were not—"

"So help me Gawd, Mistah—" He paused and then continued, "Waal, you-all know I didn't lif' my han' till he sput on me, and—I am not to blame for de mule. I'm downright sorry I put him on spoon vittles, and I needn't t've doused him in the crick." Byng evidently did not realize how strong he was.

"But what I want to know is how soon you can come to work?" said I, bringing him back to my offer. I needed him, and wasn't half sorry that he possessed a terrific punch.

"If you mean, Mistah 'er—" He hesitated a moment. "Did you say yer name was Wood? If you mean it, I can go to work jus' as soon as I taik dis heah mule ovah to the still an' tell de boss."

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That was how young Byng came to go with me, and promptly the boys nick-named him "Fighting Byng."

CHAPTER II

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Howard Byng stayed with me all that season—about eight months, and was a constant surprise. I helped him a little and taught him to read a newspaper and got rid of some of his negro dialect. He was faithful and true—a willing slave if such a term could be applied to a free-born man.

Wonderful in woodcraft, he knew just where to pitch camp to get water and avoid it. One bee meant a bee's nest nearby, and we had wild honey all the time. He knew just where to go and pull a 'possum out of a tree, we had wild turkey, and occasionally a young bear or deer. And work—he was worth any two men I ever had. He developed like a starving crop fertilized and watered. In the clean-cut, powerful, willing, cheerful "axe-man" no one could have recognized the Georgia Cracker I found hauling turpentine sap with a mule eight months before. Well barbered and tailored he would have presented a handsome appearance. I was sorry enough when the time came to part with him.

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At that time we were on the bank of the Altamara river. All of the other men had been paid but I kept Howard to pack up. The tent and outfit were to be shipped to Savannah. One day I queried:

"Howard, what are you going to do with your money?" He had asked me to keep his monthly vouchers and give him spending money as needed.

"How much money have I got coming, Mistah Wood?" he asked, coming near where I sat making out my final reports, using the mess table in the center of the big tent for a desk.

"You have more than a thousand dollars," I replied without looking up.

"A thousand dollars—sure enough money?" he exclaimed with delight, yet astonished and a little bit doubtful.

"Yes—you can go to any bank and get it in gold, if you desire."

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"Why—a thousand dollars—I never expected to have that much money in my whole life—ah—ah reckon I'll let you keep it fer me, Mistah Wood. I got no use for money now."

"I'm afraid I can't keep it for you, Howard," I replied. "I am going back to Washington, and will enter another branch of the service."

"You can't keep it for me, Mistah Wood?"

"No—that wouldn't do, you must learn to take care of it yourself."

"What can I do with ut?" he finally asked, troubled and thoughtful, as I mentioned going away.

He amused me with his simplicity. Half in jest I said, "Buy up some of this stump land—it will make you rich some day."

"If I had some of this good-for-nothing land what would I do with ut?" he asked, feigning astonishment and going over to the edge of the tent which had been opened all around. Looking out as far as he could see was a scraggly growth of pine among stumps as thick, black and forbidding as midnight in a swamp of croaking frogs.

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"This land's no better than the turpentine country—what would such cussed stuff be worth if I had ut?" he asked again. "Why, they ain't a house for miles—all of it is God-fo'saken," he insisted before I could reply.

"Howard, you must use your imagination—those stumps are full of turpentine and rosin, and after you get them out you have river-bottom land that will raise cotton as high as your shoulders for a hundred years—and right out there is deep tide-water, to take it to any part of the world."

"Yes, I know, but how you goin' to get the stumps out?" he asked quickly, still looking out.

"Blow them out with dynamite—pull them out, that's easy."

"Yes—but how am I going to get the turpentine and rosin outen the stumps after I blow 'em up?" he came back at me.

"Boil it out, and then sell the wood or make paper out of it. You ought to be able to work that out," I replied, smiling.

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Howard Byng looked out a little longer and without replying resumed packing the dishes and kitchen outfit in a big chest, while I went on with my writing. Finally he came opposite the table and surprised me by saying:

"Do you heah them little frogs yapin'—and do you heah them big bullfrogs bawlin', and do you see them buzzards flyin', and doan you know them stumps is in water where it's full of rattla's? This ain't no good country fur a white man where dey is bullfrogs and little frogs, vermin of all sorts and buzzards, and where you got to eat quinine three times a day."

"Think it over, Howard, it may be better than you imagine."

We finally got a boat as far as Brunswick. Howard insisted on going with me to Savannah where I would turn in my camp outfit. He had never been out of the woods before. His surprise and delight at being in a city for the first time was refreshing. This nineteen-year-old turpentine woods boy had never been farther than a country store, never had seen a locomotive, and to him cities had been mere dreams.

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To him the one, and only, three-story block in the place was a skyscraper. He saw big steamers and sailing ships for the first time, and acres of long wharfs loaded with naval stores, sawed timber and cotton he could scarcely believe as real until he actually touched them with his hands.

With my help he bought a good suit of clothes, shoes and hat, the first he ever owned. The barber did the rest and his delight knew no bounds. His raven hair and skin were perfect, and he would have been taken for a college athlete until he talked, his speech being a distinct shock. During these two or three days he seemed transported and almost forgot I was about to leave him.

When the time came his sorrow was distressing. He took no pains to disguise it, and lapsed into the Cracker boy, timid, and out of his element. He breathed hard and struggled.

"Mistah Wood, you leavin' makes me want to run back to the pine woods, and I guess I will," he said, standing on the wharf looking up at my steamer.

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"Howard, every man must work out his own problems," said I. "For me to attempt to advise would be to rob you of your own inspiration. You will know what you want to do before long, but don't take too big a jump at once. I believe there is good metal in you which will soon show itself, if you don't force it." I was sorry for the boy and thought for the moment I had made a mistake in bringing him out of the woods. I didn't believe anything could be accidental; his meeting me was not, I felt certain.

"Ain't there somethin' I can do to be with you? You know I'm willin' to do anything," he asked in a distinctly broken voice.

"No, Howard—for two reasons. I am going into another department and am uncertain where they will send me, and such a move, were it possible, might be harmful to you. Go to work at something here, and read—study for five years, then you may be able to go in the big world, and become somebody."

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"Do you mean I must go back to the turpentine country?" he asked, with moistening eyes, as though asking that sentence be passed upon him.

"It doesn't matter where you go, Howard, or what you do, honestly, if you will get a lot of books to read and study them. Read the lives of Lincoln and Horace Greeley, who started out of the woods. Books and study are the keys to the great outside world. If you would be more than a laborer with your hands—study, my boy," I advised, putting my hand on his broad shoulders.

"I'm goin' to do it, suh—I'm goin' to do it sho'," he repeated as he followed me to the gangplank.

And there he stood on the end of the wharf until the ship was out of sight, occasionally waving his arms. For a time I was actually disturbed by the pathos of the boy's conduct. I knew that in our country there were still thousands more like him not yet reached by our woeful educational system, especially in some parts of the South.

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My work in the Excise Department was new to me and kept me very busy for the next five years. Howard Byng had practically passed out of my mind. One day the chief

informed me that there was a lot of "moonshine" whiskey coming down the Altamara River in Southern Georgia, that the still was in the center of an immense cut-over swamp, and anyone approaching it could be seen from far away. Also that revenue officers usually came away hurriedly with bullet holes in their hats and clothing, and without the Swamp Angels who had formed the habit of not paying the federal tax on distilled liquors. He wanted to know if I would undertake to bring them in, saying that, as I hadn't many failures to my credit I could afford to stand one. But what he really meant to convey was that the case had become a stench to the department's nostrils, and that I must go well prepared to clean things up.

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I found the county was as big as Rhode Island and without a railroad; the county seat a village, and the sheriff a picturesque character. He said he could give minute directions to locate this "still," but so far as he was concerned "pusenly" he had just been re-elected and wanted to serve out his term, "sheriffing" being the best paid job in the county, and that his family needed the money. He was strongly of the belief an attempt on his part to capture the gang would be a direct bid for the undertaker and a successor.

"But, now suh, don't misunderstand," he continued. "Those three or four fellows up there in the 'cut-over' ain't no *friends* of mine."

The "still" was up the river about thirty miles, and then off three miles, in a creek that was almost dry, except at high tide.

He helped me procure a flat-bottomed rowboat, to which I attached an electric propeller which I thought would send it along quietly—oars are much too noisy—and I started out at night, expecting to get at the mouth of the creek at high tide, which would be about midnight.

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After going up the river some twenty miles, I saw a light ahead on the left bank that soon grew into a row of lights,—and electric lights, too. I thought it must be a packet coming down, but packets on that river were small, primitive affairs and again, as I drew closer I saw that the lights were not moving, but located on the bank that raised a little at that point. I thought it strange the sheriff did not mention this landmark. As I came abreast of it, I could see it was some kind of a factory, but decided to look it over, "if I come back," which the sheriff had cast doubt upon.

For a few miles above something about the contour of the bank puzzled me for a time. I was conscious of the fact that memory and geography are often linked together. Unerringly I could think of a hotel by name when I reached a town, not having thought of it before in years. Even a telephone number I could recall when the geography was right. Having discussed this mental phenomena with others I found I was not alone in possession of this freak of the brain.

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After passing that factory I reclined in the bow of the boat, lulled by the rhythmic, noiseless motion of the little screw propeller; the left bank suddenly became familiar. Then, as though a door in my memory had suddenly opened I knew it was here, on this same Altamara River, that I broke camp five years before, and the memory of forgotten Howard Byng stood before me, with the vividness of yesterday. I had expected to hear good things of him some time. I could recall his broken voice asking me to take him with me, feel his wringing hand-shake, bidding me good-bye; perhaps I magnified the abandon in his last wave of the hand as he stood on the end of the wharf watching me leave, disheartened and disconsolate as a lost soul. Then like a wave of nausea came the thought that he might be with this very gang I was going after. I believed he would be a force wherever he was. The time and place synchronized.

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But here was my landmark to enter the creek, calling for extreme caution. I had ample notice that this gang was bold and would shoot to kill, if necessary. I didn't mind the danger much, but I did fear failure. The creek was as crooked as a ram's horn and the "still" was at the very end of it, in a dug-out on a little knoll in the low land.

I felt I was near the end of it when the fog came, making the dark night almost black. I had to feel my way in the slough creek that had narrowed now to six or eight feet through high grass.

I knew when I had reached the end, for I drew alongside the scow-like boat described to me, and often seen on the river, but there was neither sound, light, nor sign of life. I took my time and was careful. I sat very quietly in the boat for a few minutes, listening and going over again my plan of action, then I felt about their boat cautiously. It was motor-driven and might carry a ton.

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Stepping out on the oozy bank, I began to crawl through the wet and clammy fog in the direction given by the sheriff, but could see nothing and was forced to feel my way along. My rifle and bag, slung over my shoulder, made progress slow and I noticed the ground was rising a little, further identifying the locality.

When I came up to a big stump the oppressive graveyard stillness was broken for the

first time by a sound like a man breathing. I crawled a little more and listened. Surely it came from human lungs. There could be no mistake. It was the stuporous breathing of a drunk.

I hitched forward again and vision became clearer. The noise came from inside the stump evidently hollow. Straining my vision I learned that it was about four feet high and one side of it missing. Then I made out the dim outlines of a man sitting inside. I cautiously felt for his form with my hand, then quickly jerked back and away.

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I had touched a naked foot, a human foot—but the heavy breathing continued. It was their lookout, their sentinel—of whom I had been warned—and he was evidently stupefied by the product from the "still," a moonshiner's great weakness.

I could trace the long-barreled squirrel rifle standing close beside him and I waited cautiously for other signs of life. None came. I touched his foot again. No move. Ready to throttle him on the instant, I pressed the foot again slightly, and then the other one. The "swamp juice" was squarely on the throne. The fellow was inanimate.

I was able to manacle his feet without awakening him, then took away his rifle and began to manacle his hands and his feet. Soon they were ironed—and he still slept.

My success emboldened me. One man was harmless even if he made an outcry but I still walked cautiously, trying to locate the "still" house in the cave. I was confronted with a collection of uprooted stumps, a circular barricade, but in a moment I caught the slightest flicker of light. I was sure then, and moved silently along toward the layout. I knew there must be an entrance, and I now plainly detected the fumes of charcoal and the mash tub. The next thing in order was to get inside.

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Following the circle of stumps I came to the entrance, a ditch that led down to the floor level of the place. Time was speeding and I was afraid the stupefied sentinel might awaken and give an alarm. Silently I worked up to a narrow door crudely made of upright board planks. Big cracks enabled me to see the interior. There were two men. The older was sitting asleep against the wall, the younger man moving about. I could see his outline plainly by the light of a candle. His figure seemed familiar. He opened the furnace door to put more charcoal under the still—I could see his face. Howard Byng! His hair was long again, his face, smooth when I last saw it, was now covered with a bushy black beard. God only knows how I regretted the work ahead of me. If I had only declined this job! The thought brought a cold sweat.

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CHAPTER III

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My shock at seeing Howard Byng in such a place was distinctly depressing. My soul cried out for the boy for whom I had formed a strong attachment and I leaned against the narrow ditch entrance for a moment, overcome. There are pigeon holes in our memories for every sort of information, the pleasant things and the unpleasant. I had placed Howard Byng in a warm, honest, hopeful compartment, and to suddenly learn that I had warmed a viper produced a conflict of emotions. They seemed a jangle of sharp, ear-splitting sounds, as hammers played upon steel to produce discord. I was overcome for the moment. I felt Howard Byng had done me a personal wrong as I vividly recalled again his honest, fearless, cordial gaze, when he bade me good-bye. I had looked into his eyes and felt sure he was clean; I knew he had a big, tender heart. Now he had gone back, and worse—he had become a notorious outlaw and I—I was to take him, dead or alive.

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This went through my mind in seconds. How far was I to blame for not wanting to take that boy with me there and then? I could let him escape, but the law—it must be fulfilled. I could not neglect my duty to the state. I don't mind confessing personal ambition, pride and love of adventure; and for audacity and boldness, this Federal violation had no equal. I wanted this to be my last and best work for the Excise Department before I was transferred to the Counterfeit Division.

It doesn't affect Howard Byng's history much how I let off a stick of dynamite on one side of the establishment, and by a flare of light took both men chained to their drunken sentinel in their own boat with the copper "still" and a dozen or more jugs of moonshine for evidence. Another heavy charge of explosive left a deep hole where the "still" house stood.

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My prisoners were sullen and uttered no sound. They knew their prison days were at hand. I put them in their own boat, towing mine, and hurried quickly down the creek to the river. Though manacled hand and foot and chained to a cleet, I felt none too safe.

I knew Howard Byng was powerful, likely cunning and treacherous now, and the strain was considerable. Three o'clock in the morning I passed the old camp ground.

The night packet, due at the county seat early in the morning, was landing at the big plant when I got there. Why not get my prisoners aboard it and be sure?

I ran to the landing and in a few minutes I had them on deck. The captain fixed it with the foreman to look out for my boats. I would come back for them on the packet's return trip that night.

Well, when I got my men in a good light on the packet, the man I thought was Howard Byng resembled him only in physique and hair. I was more delighted at that discovery than I was at the complete success of my night's work. Byng had a bold, fighting aquiline nose and a big man's ear, brain and features to back it. This man's nose traveled down like a roller coaster, blank, horsey features, a dish-faced, vicious animal, his ears like the flap of a tent, his eyes burning like a cornered wolf.

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Whether it was thinking so much of Howard Byng or the geography, I had an impression of his nearness and it bothered me. I asked the somnolent sheriff about him after delivering to him the "swamp angels" next morning. He said he wasn't much of a traveler, never heard of any such man and didn't even know about the big plant where I left the boats, though only thirty miles up the river.

The packet carried me back there about ten at night, and, having no freight, only touched to let me off. My boats were on one end of the well-built landing wharf paralleling the river, and now at the other end was a little schooner of perhaps two hundred tons burden. It was all lit up and everyone was busy, paying no attention to me. Doors wide open, I went about to satisfy my curiosity. The long, electric-lighted building was a paper mill. The sheet it made was not very wide, perhaps four and half feet, but it came white as snow onto big rolls as fast as a horse could gallop. I saw some finished and marked for a big New York newspaper. That explained the schooner outside. "Where in the name of Heaven do they get the material to make such paper?" I asked myself.

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Back of the paper mill was a great surprise, an acre of blazing furnaces lighted up the night and leviathan steel retorts, throbbing with life and pressure, emitted the pleasant odor of turpentine, served by standard-gauge tracks, and, behind them, mountain high, was a pile of blackened pine-tree stumps with long roots, apparently plucked from the earth. They were piled by an up-to-date derrick, with steel arms a hundred and fifty feet in length. On a platform opposite, paralleling the tracks, were tiered cotton bales, shining white in the furnace lights.

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I returned to the paper-machine room, thoughtful indeed. The immense cut-over stump lands of Georgia, stretching to the horizon over the tide-washed river, took on a distinctly different aspect.

That sheet of paper, coming down over the long row of steam-heated dryers, through the calenders wound into perfect rolls at express speed, dropped to the floor automatically, as sheaves of wheat from a harvester. A giant Corliss engine, seen through the door, ponderously and merrily answered to the life-giving ether from the roaring boilers. Happily married to its task an electric generator beside it suggested a sparrow, saucily singing a tune to an eagle. I leaned against a pillar, transported to another world, the world of use, and felt some of its joy. Then I became conscious of being observed, but did not turn.

The paper machine, all new and perfectly geared, was so long that its even width appeared to narrow at the far end where the sheet originated as wet pulp. The concrete floor was like a newly planed board. The machinery was not noisy, it sung. Every belt, gear and bearing was timed. The place actually hypnotized. It was divine. Divinity and usefulness are the same. The machines seemed to be singing a hymn to some master-mind.

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Behind me an order was given. There was something familiar in the voice, the sureness of a natural commander, which I associated at once with the wonderful operation going on before me. A stalwart back was toward me. The lower brain, neck, shoulders and torso belonged to a man, perhaps not quite as wide or tall as our big Highlanders. My interest intensified until suddenly he appeared to turn at my will for a face view. This time there could be no mistaking the delicately chiseled, fighting, aquiline nose, marvelous jaw and chin of Howard Byng.

CHAPTER IV

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Byng stared hard for a moment, then his snapping eyes kindled and his face evidenced genuine delight as he recognized me. That his affection had endured there could be no doubt as he advanced with long, graceful strides to meet me. He grasped my hand with a tremendous squeeze of heartiness and I am bound to confess that as he stood before me I could see in the makings the refined Howard Byng—man of

affairs.

"Mr. Wood!" he began, fervently pressing my hand, "there is no living person I would rather see than you. How did you get here? How did you find this jumping-off place? I can hardly believe it is you."

"Howard"—I hesitated, feasting my eyes upon him—"it was indeed something of an accident that brought me here."

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"Well, suh, you are here and that's enough. I don't care how you got here, but I swear by the great horn spoon that you are not going to get away from me. I have waited too long for this meeting. Your bed, board, and comfort are provided for indefinitely." His eyes glittered, as he looked me full in the face and restrained the pent-up enthusiasm of his natural Southern hospitality. Then, affectionately he took my arm and led me into his office, a big, cheerful room, something of a library, suggesting comfort and refinement.

"For Heaven's sake, man, sit down and tell me all about it," said I, sinking into an inviting leather chair.

"These cigars are made especially for me," he exclaimed like an overjoyed boy as he passed the humidor, "but I can't say you'll like 'em."

"They are bound to be an improvement on the dog-leg twist you once offered me while we sat on the sled against the sap barrel," I suggested with a laugh.

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"You remember that, too," said he, slapping his knee. "Well, suh, I have thought of it myself more'n a hundred times. Yes, suh, that all seems like many, many years ago, but I'll never forget it. You know it's mighty strange, and if I hadn't been a dunce I would have guessed you were around when I came out this mornin' and saw that strange boat, the copper 'still,' and the demijohns full of moonshine. My foreman told me where they cum from, but, of course, I nevah thought of you havin' anything to do with it. Strange, too, for I have sorter been thinking about you the last three or four days."

"It's the old story—think hard and——"

"Yes, suh, and, doggone it all, I knew you tole me you were going into the revenue when you left me in Savannah. I've been in Washington two or three times and tried to find you. I nevah once thought of you in connection with this local matter. What a fool!" he exclaimed, his eyes gloating upon me from his comfortable chair across the big flat desk between us.

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He did not speak grammatically as yet, but there were signs of improvement, and the effort in that direction was apparent.

"You know," he went on, delightedly, "there must have been something wrong with me. I wanted to find you the worst way, and I thought I looked around all right, when I went there—I mean to the revenue office in Washington. First a boy would ask me questions, then a man, then another man, and then about the time I thought I was going to get somewhere they would tell me there was no such person there. Do you suppose they thought I was a moonshiner just finished a long term, and was gunnin' for the man who put me in?" he concluded, with a dry little laugh.

I had to explain that for our safety in private life operatives were known to everyone but the chiefs by a number—and sometimes by another name. The office never divulges the real names, private addresses, or where we work. Here we were interrupted by the entrance of an old-time darkey.

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"Yes, Marse Howard," said he cheerfully, in answer to the button.

"Uncle George," began Howard Byng, with his soul shining in his eyes, "a prodigal has returned. We ain't got any fatted calf to kill, but we have got food, and plenty of it. Bring us something so that we may eat and make merry,—and then prepare the guest cabin. Didn't I tell you when we finished it that we would have use for it soon?" All this in a fatherly manner toward the old servant.

"Now, Mr. Wood, I've got you in a corner. First I want to know how long you can stay with me. You show up just when I need you, and excuses don't go."

His cordiality was so real that I felt glad I had cleaned up my last matter for the "Excise" ahead of time and was not due to report to the new division for several weeks. Indeed it seemed good to be able to acquiesce for I could readily see that his isolation intensified an otherwise normal desire for companionship. And there did appear to be something on which he needed advice or a side light. He was as delighted as a young boy when I said if I could establish communication with Washington I might stay on for several days.

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"Good—fine!" he exclaimed, and, slapping me on the back, arose to move a reading lamp and clear the center of the desk for the food.

"I finally got a long-distance wire in here and am open to the world now," said he happily. "Do you know you took a big chance leaving those jugs of moonshine in that open boat? If I hadn't seen and put 'em away you'd 'a' had none left and my works would have stopped. Niggers, and white men, too, for that matter, do love moonshine. I've seen that boat pass here lots of times and wondered how long they'd run."

"All I was thinking about was getting those men off my hands," I replied. Then I related, briefly, how I happened to find their "look-out" while in a stupor, and of my sensations when I imagined I saw Howard himself inside the "still" house, and how, through luck, I had surprised and stunned them by using dynamite. He expressed great wonder at my escape and showed intense eagerness to hear every little detail of my experiences.

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"Well, suh, you have performed the well-nigh impossible. And that is because you went at it just right. To men living in these swamps, where you never hear anything louder than a bull frog, a rifle shot is a terrific report, but when you let loose a real noise, blow in the whole side of their dug-out and let stumps roll in on them as you say, they couldn't help but give up. Those varmints have been here for a long time. They are bad men. You know moonshiners ain't always bad when you know 'em. That old jail down there was built before the revolution, an' they've got friends that hate the law. These people along this river are two hundred years behind the times, just like—just like I was when you found me in the turpentine woods, an' I would have been there yit if it wasn't for you. You know that!" he exclaimed. "An' you were right when you thought I might be moonshinin'. How I kept out of it I don't know for I hated the law, too, then. They argue that whiskey was made a long time, a hundred years or more, without tax, and ought to be free yit. And that feeling ag'in' the law is fierce, and these people are awful spiteful when they're ag'in' anything. You can hardly understand it unless—unless you've been one of 'em, like I have."

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He was interrupted by the old black servant, who covered the desk with linen on which he placed platters of cold meat, wild honey and biscuits. Except for the slight vibration and hum of the big paper plant, I could easily have imagined myself lunching in the library of a Fifth Avenue home.

"Now," resumed Byng, after we had drawn up, "I used to like moonshine, but somehow I don't care for it any more. But this elderberry juice—woods stuff, too," said he, pulling a cork from a bottle, "is mighty fine. No kick in it especially, but just as good, and I want to tell you how near I came to being a moonshiner myself right where you found your gang."

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"I am eager to hear it, Howard," said I laughingly, "and I won't turn it in at headquarters, either."

"You know," said he, "when you left me there in Savannah, and your steamer got out of sight, I felt pretty bad. You taught me to read and write and gave me an idea about things outside. You were my friend. You may not know exactly how a Georgia Cracker sticks to his friends. Well, when I couldn't see you any more, I went over behind a pile of cotton bales, laid down and began to beller just like a kid, or a fool. Then it seemed to me that I wanted to die. The world had come to an end for me an' I didn't care a damn if I died on the spot. Some men came along and said, 'See the Cracker with a cryin' jag.' Do you know what a 'bellerin' jag' is? Well, when there is a funeral down here there's usually plenty of moonshine. Some want to holler, some want to shoot, and most of the wimmen get on a 'bellerin' jag.' I thought of that. Then I began to wonder what I was blubberin' about anyhow. Certain it wasn't for you. Then it came into my fool head that I was jest sorry and bellerin' for myself. Why should I be sorry for myself? I had two good legs, two good arms, and two good eyes. So I got up and walked away. You told me what to do an' I was going to do it. Then I came back here—not exactly here, but back to the old camp we had just left. Finally I did find some land I could buy, not very much, but it had an old turpentine 'still' on it, right here on this spot we are now sitting. I built this building so my office would be where I had made my first experiment—just as you told me to."

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"Evidently you prospered from the jump," said I, looking about the big, well-finished room.

"No, suh, at first I didn't get anything. I was tired and mad. I came near cussin' you for telling me to spend my money for nuthin'. The moonshiners found I was all right, and offered to help me start, and several times I was just going to do it, but somehow I couldn't. You may not believe it, but when I was ready to go moonshinin', you just stood in front of me. I could feel you touch my arm, and point to the old turpentine still. You made me go ahead, an', after I worked and worked, thought and thought, I found out how to work it. I struck it right. I discovered the secret of makin' turpentine and rosin from these here stumps, and paper from what's left—and you stood right here and laughed with me, and was as glad as I was. And nobody has yet found out how I do it, and they ain't going to. I'm twenty years ahead of 'em. Sneaks come here to find out but I spot 'em quick and kick 'em out. I'll tell you the secret because you made me do it. Now, suh, jest tell me what it was that kept me from

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making moonshine, and made me go ahead as I did. To-morrow, when it's light, I'll show it all to you. It ain't much, but I've made friends in Savannah and New York where I sell and buy my supplies. I have a nice little plant that's making money, and the moonshiners have gone to prison. That's enough for to-night. You had no sleep last night an' I'm going to put you to bed. Come on."

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As we parted at my cabin door Howard Byng put his long arms about me and gave me a tight squeeze.

CHAPTER V

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I won't try to account for Byng's impression that I, though far away, was flogging him along to achievement. Such influence is more common than might be supposed, so common, in fact, that the wonder is that it is not labeled and tagged by everyone, instead of remaining a part of the equipment of first-class secret-service men, and accomplished scoundrels.

Criminologists understand it. It is the libertine's long suit. Power to obsess through concentrated thought. Now that is as substantial as railroad spikes and can nail its victims to the flooring of the bottomless pits, or carry them safely, chastely through a life well spent.

Aaron Burr was a most notable disciple of thought transference. He prepared his victim's mind at safe distance, so that the finish was a mere matter of his own convenience, and it is written he never failed. Women of all classes, well-meaning and virtuous, are unable to understand this phenomena, until too late, in many cases. Early training and intuition are the safe-guards. But good influences are more powerful and account for more wonderful occurrences. Power of analysis, derived from education and experience, enable men, and especially women, to overcome their impulses; to keep their minds open and cautious, thus enabling them to unconsciously shield themselves against auto-suggestion from cunning rascals. I would not offer this if it did not have a great deal to do with the life of Howard Byng.

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When I awakened next morning I could have imagined myself in a first-class hotel. The room furnishings were of the best, with a generous bath and every convenience. But I had only to look out of the cabin window at the river and the great cut-over land beyond, with its blackened stumps grinning above the stunted growth, like numerous outpost sentinels of the infernal regions, to readjust myself to my exact location. I was surprised to see a small private yacht anchored, amid-stream, just off the mill.

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What Byng called his guest cabin was a good-sized bungalow, on higher ground some distance below the plant along the river. It had the open hall of the Southern type and a veranda all around, every room being private, with entrance from either hall or veranda. While the old darkey prepared breakfast I looked out over the one-story concrete mill and the smoking plant below, still in full blast, running twenty-four hours a day, as all paper mills must. Farther back were comfortable cabins for the negro help.

Byng soon came up and was thoroughly elated. He took me by the arm and led me to the other side of the cabin and pointed out the yacht in the river. "I'm mighty glad he has come while you are here," he said. "Somehow I feel safe now. That yacht belongs to a Mr. Purdue. Did you ever hear of the Purdues of New York?" he paused to inquire anxiously.

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I thought I could recall a Purdue, once a prominent railroad man.

"That's him, that's what he wrote. He's got twenty thousand acres of stump land, mostly pine, a little gum and chestnut, joinin' mine on the north and up the river, and wants to sell out to me. It's a big deal and I want your advice. We've been dickering by mail for some time and finally he promised to run down, but I never expected he would. His boat isn't very big, but she's deep and I don't see how he ever got up the river. Must have caught the ebb and had luck," he went on, still excited. "He seems to have his family, too. I saw two or three wimmen moving about," he added, as if that was an added responsibility, or an important event. Outside of negroes, women were seldom seen in that desolate country.

"You see," continued Byng, as we sat down to breakfast, "I've got to be careful. As near as I can figure, I am the only one who knows how to make enough out of my turpentine and rosin from pine stumps so that my paper product is all velvet. They know I do it and are trying their heads off to find out my method. But they never will. I'll tell you and that's all. Just as you said, years ago, the soil goes clear down and'll never stop raisin' cotton. I'm going to take you out to-day and show you the class of cotton I'm raisin' where I pulled the stumps out. I've got a lot of stump land, that'll last a long time the way I'm going now, but I'd like to have enough to last all my life,

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and this old codger has got it joinin' me, and it ain't worth a damn cent to anyone else. Now do you see why I'm a little excited?" he asked, with a broad, cordial smile, "and do you see the fight me and this feller is goin' to have if he really wants to get rid of payin' non-resident taxes? Of course, he's a business man and sharp, much sharper than me. That's why I am so glad you're here to sort of watch over me in the deal, and see when I'm going wrong. What do you think I'd better do?"

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"Well, I don't know; if you have written——"

"No, I ain't. I got bit once writin' letters. And once is enough for me," he interrupted sharply.

"Then the only way is to let things take a natural course. Let him raise the trade question. Invite them ashore, for they have probably been cruising for some time and are tired of their cramped quarters in the small yacht. Let them occupy this bungalow all to themselves. You can find some other place for——"

"Find another place for you!" he interrupted, dropping his knife and fork. "Hell's Bells! Me find another place for you! Not if he had all of Southern Georgia to sell for a penny. You are in my best guest chamber and you're goin' to stay there, suh. You can stay on the rest of your life and have Uncle George do nuthin' but wait on you all the time. That's my orders," he added, with perfect sincerity, and with such grace as only a Southern man knows how to extend to a trusted friend. "Besides, unless he's got a big family, there's room to spare."

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"Well, you get the idea. Be nice to him, but wait for him to talk trade. You know how much more chesty and louder a rooster crows when he is in his own barnyard and among his own hens?"

"Yes—yes, I've seen 'em at it, they're right laughable," he replied, quite able to see the application.

"Well, you are on your own ground, in your own plant, and while you needn't crow so loud, you can keep your chest away out."

"Do you think I have done so much? It has come so slow, mighty hard, so much plannin'. Machinery is hard to learn, but I got it down fine now—engines, dynamos, and all."

"Yes—you have astonished me, Howard; your all-around progress is amazing, and in another five years you will be the most prominent man in Southern Georgia."

"You can't ever know what it means to me to hear you say that, for"—he hesitated again to control himself—"for I would still be a Georgia Cracker if it wasn't for you," and unashamed he looked at me squarely with moistened eyes.

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"An'—an'"—he halted again, contemplating as anyone might the one thing apparently unattainable. His lips quivered as he looked out past the plant and cabins to the growing cotton, the stump land and swamp which his genius had converted into a garden of usefulness and beauty. Then, with even voice under control, he went on, "I ain't much more'n a Cracker yit. I talk Cracker an' I think Cracker, that's why I ain't no match for Purdue even when it comes to tradin'. I ain't got time to go to college. What can I do? There's no livin' being I'd take advice of that kind from 'cept you. My dad and mam, I suppose, did the best they could, but they didn't give me much but life and an appetite for moonshine. We come from good English stock, but it's run down. I'm asking you what I can do for myself, 'cause I know you kin tell me, can't yer?"

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"Howard," I began, delighted that he could see himself, and that he was ready and willing to struggle for better things. "Are you making money now?"

"Yes, I'm making money. Every roll of paper that drops off that machine is clear profit, worth around fifty dollars, and you know they come off pretty fast, but, shuckins!—ye soon find money don't git ye much. It's more fun to see the black stumps turn into white paper and the cotton grow where they cum from!"

"You are better off now than most college graduates," I replied, "but you do need better English. It will help you to think better. Write to a northern college to send you a sort of tutor secretary, give him some work about the office, watch him, and learn to talk as he does. Insist that he corrects you every time you make a mistake. Get the best dictionary, learn how to use it, and keep it handy all the time. Also an encyclopedia, and an atlas. It strikes me that you are already long on arithmetic." He laughed at this thought.

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"An' I'll git rid of my Cracker talk, will I?" he asked, his face brightening in delightful anticipation.

"Yes, in a year."

"I knew there was a way, an' you could tell me," said he. Then he linked his arm in mine and dragged me out in the open for a little look around the place.

The Purdues finally came ashore, accompanied by two servants, and occupied the opposite end of the bungalow.

Purdue, retired capitalist, undoubtedly affluent, cherubic, in facial appearance jolly, and with a bare pate to which still appended a slightly curling fringe below his hat, laughed with you, but always there came a shrewd glitter in his eyes when trade matters were broached. The itching palm and a penchant for melons yet to be cut were easily a part of his inherited tendency.

Mother Purdue, muchly inclined toward obesity and cynicism, was a human interrogation point. Both children apparently loved the father best and made of him a chum.

The elder married daughter, Mrs. Potter, was Wellesley finished, and a growing replica of the mother. Her mouth had been spoiled at the foolish age by a constant effort to produce dimples in her cheeks, but matrimony and time had been kind and she was now quite sensible. But sister Norma, a thin, frail slip of a girl—the undoubted makings of a beautiful woman—appeared to have arbitrarily rejected the least desirable tendencies of both parents, by the sacrifice of corpulence.

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I was busy with final reports and paid little attention to the new arrivals during the week that followed, but Byng, who ate with me usually, said that they were having the time of their lives, and that papa Purdue had evidently forgotten he had stump land for sale. Their boat drew too much water to navigate the river above, and, at Purdue's suggestion, the moonshiner's old flat-bottomed, square-end, scowl-like boat was cleaned out, and, after the motor was overhauled, was used by them for frequent trips of inspection to their property above, a tarpaulin being provided to protect them against the sun.

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One mid-afternoon Byng rushed excitedly to the bungalow. He had received a telephone message from the station, for me. It was from headquarters:

"Sheriff reports your prisoners broke jail last night. Still at large. Report details of escape, insist on posse, and do what you can to apprehend."

"Didn't I tell ye? Didn't I tell ye?" he repeated, walking about the room. "That damn sheriff is about half-moonshiner himself, and the old jail would fall down if ye looked at it," he added excitedly.

"Where will these fellows strike for, Howard?" I asked, gathering up my writing.

"You know Cracker moonshiners as well as I do, maybe. You know they are like a she-bear, or a fox. The minute they're loose they go back to their hole and cubs. They haven't had any moonshine and their tongues are hanging fer it. I'll bet you them fellers are back to the old still by this time, digging fer some they've hid and getting ready to make more. They jest can't stay away. They think you've gone, an' the sheriff'll let 'em alone. He always has."

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"But they escaped last night. They must come thirty or forty miles, so would not have quite time to be there now, would they?" Even as I asked the question I was shedding white duck for my working clothes.

"Yes—that's so, but they'll be there before you can get there. What are you going to do?"

"I think I'll try and beat the moonshiners to it and have things ready for them. As long as you are sure they are going back I think they ought to have a hearty welcome, Howard, don't you?" I asked, putting on high-top boots and yanking my kit from under the bed which I thought was used for the last time.

"Yes, sure, but ye got to take me along," he said, facing me, delighted at the prospect.

"Howard, these men have likely picked up guns and may put up a nasty fight. I will get them by some kind of strategy as I did before. Besides, if I get it, that's why I am paid. You can't be spared so well, for you are at the head of a business, by which a lot of people live. You have guests here to look after, too," I urged.

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He stopped at the window and soberly looked out across the river. Then he walked to the other window, gazed over a long field of growing cotton, a verdant green punctuation of a new era, a new life to him and the whole section.

"An' you want me to stay an' let you go up there alone?" he asked in an injured tone, somewhat in the same manner as he had requested me to take him north five years before. I could see Mamma Purdue, out of stays, sound asleep in a steamer chair at

the other end of the veranda, with Papa nearby examining critically the latest vital statistics of Wall Street.

"No, siree—ye got to lemme go this time. Do you 'spose I'm going to let any damn Cracker moonshiner get a drop on me with a long John, when I got a gun down here that shoots a dozen times while he's loadin'. Yes, I got guests, but you're the only one I can see now, and I ain't going ter let you enter that swamp with three ag'in' ye. No, sir, ye got to lemme go," he insisted vehemently.

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"All right, Howard, get ready," I replied, seeing there was no use to object. "When's flood water? We've got to have it to get up that creek with a boat."

"She floods to-day at five. I know; for my schooner *Canby* will cross the bar then—inbound."

"As we will have less than two hours to get to the creek we must hurry," I said. "But keep mum. If Mamma Purdue hears of it she will think the whole family is going to be kidnapped or murdered," I added, hurrying preparations.

"We'll have to go in that little skiff of your'n. The Purdue man went out with the young wimmen a while ago in the other one."

"Get ready and be down at the mill as soon as you can."

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"I'll be there in a jiffy," he said, hurrying away.

As I hastened out, Mamma Purdue's astonishment at my changed appearance suddenly converted a waking yawn into an interrogation, but my intercourse with the visitors had been limited to observation and prevented inquiry.

Byng, again a woodsman in hunting outfit, brought out the oars and helped the little electric motor skiff along. His great arms and back delighted in action, as he lapsed into the silent wildness of a woodsman hunter. He scanned the river banks unceasingly for signs of the skulking moonshiners, and when we rounded the bend and passed the spot where our camp was five years before we exchanged glances. Silence was necessary. When about two miles from the creek we met the flat-bottom boat, close to shore, in charge of the "Purdue man" as Howard called him. The two girls were gathering lilies from over the sides. Howard waved at them and, as we passed closely, warned them not to go ashore at that point.

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"Why did you do that?" I queried, for the shore had the usual appearance except that it seemed to still have its full virgin growth of thick gums and other soft woods the loggers did not yet want.

"That's Alligator Island. It's more'n a mile long, and they never cut it over 'cause they said the gum logs were no good, but more'n likely it's something else. I go there hunting, but wear heavy cowhide boots. I can always get a turkey, find a bee tree, and a bear if I want one, an' I've seen bob cats as big as houn' dogs," he told me in a suppressed voice, but never relaxed his scrutiny of grass patches and stumps along the shore on both sides.

After we passed into the creek he held his rifle at full cock and faced ahead, the least movement of the high, slough grass was given a piercing search the whole way up the narrowing creek to the old still. Evidently the gang hadn't arrived there yet.

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But Howard Byng's sixth sense, his knowledge of woodcraft and the natives, especially moonshiners, prompted speed for he "just knew" they would make a "bee line" for the old still. His feverish haste indicated that he felt even more than he voiced. Some uprooted stumps that commanded a good view of the still and the creek, too, would hide us and make a good barricade.

We planted dynamite on both sides of the hole made by my last shot to blow the place up, and we covered the small wires leading to us behind the stumps.

I could see why Byng knew the men would come back. There was plenty of shade and lumber, making reconstruction easy, and daylight inspection revealed that my last shot had not quite demolished their outfit.

Howard insisted on getting out of sight as soon as possible. He acted as though he could see them coming which recalled to my mind his uncanny premonition when working for me as an "axe-man" five years before. He found a place for his rifle and held it full cock, glancing occasionally back of us, to prevent a possible surprise attack from the rear. They must come from the river and the sun being behind us was to our advantage if they came from the direction expected.

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It wasn't long before Byng started up like a tiger gathering its feet to spring. I could see nothing at first. The narrow creek we came up was crooked as a corkscrew and was visible but a short distance through high swamp grass. However, I soon saw what made him start and his eyes turn to live coals. Something like a small pole or rifle barrel, that was visible above the grass a half-mile away, moved slowly but surely. Later I could see it was following the meanderings of the creek. Then, as our

eyes became accustomed, we could see two of them.

"They've got a boat and are coming up the creek," he whispered between set teeth, the knots again forming on the lower angle of his great jaw.

It may be that he guessed the real truth before I did, and his blood began to surge. Intensely excited, we watched the thin rifle barrels follow the creek slowly, carefully, stealthily. Soon we noticed two more, and could hear the muffled exhaust of a motor. I looked at Byng and saw that he understood. He was again like a wild man, burning for revenge, and he grew worse when the boat rounded the last bend in the creek, revealing three outlaws in the boat in which we saw the Purdue sisters but a short time before. The sun-protecting tarpaulin was torn off, and it was the four supporting uprights that we saw moving above the grass.

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They came slowly, suspiciously watching every quarter like wild animals. Byng's fingers moved so nervously about the trigger of his rifle trained upon them that I reached over and touched his shoulder warningly. I was afraid he would kill them, and moonshining, alone, was no cause for that. He held himself in restraint through powerful effort, and awaited signal from me. I could see that he had the same sickening thought. What had they done with the two young ladies—his guests?

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CHAPTER VII

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The comfort and safety of a Southern man's guests comes before his own. They are a part of him and more, and with grace he acknowledges it. Even the Cracker makes you feel instantly what is in his heart. What indignity, what insults, what injury had been visited upon Howard Byng's guests by these outlaws when they took the boat was a matter sure of a reckoning. Without my restraint I am certain he would have shot down each renegade without compunction.

When they vacated the boat and furtively searched for hostile signs I warned him again. Howard was right, the two older men made a "bee-line" for the demolished still, rolled a stump, lifted a rock and eagerly drank from the hidden jug. The younger one stood amid the wreck cursing the law. He brushed the jug aside, when offered him, and went down into the crater blasted out by my dynamite. He was joined by the older men, evidently planning night covering from the wreck, for the weather began to threaten in the east.

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Byng's eyes glowed when I nervously touched the wires to the battery, exploding the planted charge. Dirt and débris shot high in the air as he ran swiftly to the spot where our outlaws were safely buried for the time being.

We dug them out one at a time and secured their hands and feet. They were not hurt, just surface cuts, that bled. Howard worked with the rapidity and fierceness of a demon. I could see he had worked out a plan. Then the two old men begged for whiskey.

"Give it to them; they'll be easier to handle," I suggested.

He gave each the jug and while they drank glared at the younger man, the leader. He looked at the threatening clouds. It would soon be dark. He sat down where he could see the young leader's face, whose wolfish eyes were balls of animal fire. Howard Byng was the Georgia Cracker again, grim, determined and terrible.

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"Eph Bradshaw," he began, with set jaw, "I know you. I never tried to hurt you. I knew you was moonshinin' here but let you alone. You hev hurt me and you hev got ter pay. Them wimmen you put outen that boat were my wimmen. Decent moonshiners nevah hurt wimmen. What did you do with 'em?" he asked, suppressed, but now actually a savage.

Bradshaw looked at the eighteen-inch steel rod I had put between his manacled hands and feet instead of a chain. Finally compelled by Byng's savage sense of injury, he blurted, "They hev our boat; we only tuk ut."

"What did you do with the wimmen?"

Bradshaw's eyes burned fiercer.

"Eph Bradshaw," began Byng, getting up, "if you don't tell what you done with them wimmen, my wimmen, I'll cut yer tongue out and feed your carcass to the dogs and buzzards."

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The moonshiner believed that I would protect him as my prisoner. I could not possibly have saved him from Howard Byng, maddened by apprehension that his women folk had been injured or worse. Every corpuscle in his swarthy, rugged body was aflame, his face fiendishly illuminated.

With terrible determination, he took out a hunting knife, opened and dropped it within reach, threw the manacled moonshiner on his back, placed his boot on his neck, then, with his pistol barrel he pried his mouth open, deftly pulling out the outlaw's tongue. Dropping pistol for knife he pressed the keen edge against it and hissed, "Now will yer tell?"

Although savage and game, the moonshiner gave in.

Whatever can be said against appealing to Judge Lynch in the South or elsewhere, one thing stands out on close analysis—that this court is seldom appealed to except for one thing. Womenfolk are sacred and the least disrespect, or violation of their rights, is sufficient cause for the summary taking of life.

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Bradshaw knew with whom he had to deal and that Byng would not wait long for his answer. A few seconds and his life would go out forever.

"We just put 'em out," he panted, as soon as he came erect and had regained his breath.

"Where did you put 'em out?" shouted the fiercely burning Howard Byng.

"On the island. We didn't hurt 'em."

"What did you do to the man with 'em?"

Bradshaw lapsed again into sullenness until Byng moved toward him menacingly.

"We threw him in the river because he fit us fur the boat. It's our boat."

"You put two lone wimmen on Alligator Island and not a house fur ten miles, and threw the man in the river 'cause he wanted to take care of 'em?" Byng paused, that he might resist the vengeance that surged within him.

"Eph Bradshaw," said he, solemnly, "I'm going to look fur them wimmen, an' if a hair on their heads is hurt, I'll have yer heart. I'll smash yer skull like I would a snake." The moonshiner shrunk back and shivered.

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Byng walked down to the boats. The tide had left them on the mud. He then gazed at the clouding sky as he returned to me.

"I'm goin' to get them wimmen. I wouldn't stay on Alligator Island a night like this for half of Georgia. A rain is cumin' from the northeast and it'll be nasty. You'll have the tide after midnight to let you out with these fellers. You can bring 'em, can't you?"

"Either dead or alive," I replied.

Byng went back to the boats, and tied the oars inside the skiff. Then, as though the boat was a cockleshell, he picked it up from the mud, letting the center seat rest on his shoulders, and started, rifle in hand, down through high swamp grass toward the river, three miles away.

"You'll find me along this side of the island somewhere when the tide brings you there," he called back out of the darkness.

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I moved my manacled moonshiner to the highest part near their lookout stump, chained the two together, and began a watch that would end with a flood tide, eight or ten hours later. I knew what a northeast rain was like in Georgia—bad lightning and thunder. What would become of Mrs. Potter, little more than a girl with no knowledge of woods, and the frail, nervous Norma, who had been so carefully and lovingly shielded by doting parents. Then I thought of the grief and distress of her mother and father awaiting their return, with neither Byng nor myself there to offer advice and consolation.

I hoped devoutly Byng would find the girls and get them home before any serious shock should result from their exposure. Then I blamed myself for allowing the Purdues to use the moonshiners' boat.

Nothing happened before the flood tide when I got my prisoners in their boat and started. The storm was bad, the rain came in sheets. I got alongside the island about three in the morning, when the storm abated somewhat. Hugging the shore closely I found Howard's skiff. It told me the whole story. He had been unsuccessful, those girls had been on the island all night exposed to that fearful storm without shelter, and possibly worse.

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I ran in beside the skiff, stopped my motor and listened. I heard nothing but owls that seemed to have a voice in the deadly stillness like human beings in sore distress. I examined the skiff again. It was empty with the exception of the oars. I shouted time and again at the top of my voice, only to be answered by spectral owls. I could not leave my prisoners, so had to await for daybreak, at the first sign of which I took them ashore and chained them to a tree.

I then removed my boots to pour the water out, as they had been full since it began

to rain. The prisoners begged for moonshine. They looked pitiful enough, wet to the skin, dirty and bloody. I gave them some, then filled a flask and started. The island was not wide and I went to the lower end and back, shouting repeatedly, without results.

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When I did find them at the extreme upper end, Howard Byng presented a sorry spectacle, this wild Cracker man, with eyes bloodshot, clothed only with pants and shirt, for he had given the girls everything else. He had found them in the night, completely prostrated. Mrs. Potter was paralyzed with fear and could only moan, Norma was shocked into hysterics, lying with her head on Mrs. Potter's lap. They were in white summer attire and their soaked clothes clung to their bodies.

At the sight of me and daylight and several swallows of moonshine, Mrs. Potter revived enough to give serious attention to Norma, now in sort of a deathlike coma. By vigorous rubbing and finally a stimulant, she revived. Howard carried her in his arms, talking to her as he would a child, telling her she would "soon be home to mamma," while I steadied Mrs. Potter toward the boat, a half mile away. Until Norma was delivered safely home she was his woman.

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At sight of the prisoners Mrs. Potter clung to me and groaned. Howard heard and tried to keep Norma from seeing them, but did not succeed. Her scream would have pierced any man's heart.

Mrs. Potter realized her sister's danger, braced herself, but was unable to do much more than wring her hands, moan and caress the young girl. It was an unpleasant experience, and I never want to go through it again. I know how to handle men, but drenched, starved, hysterical women were a sorry puzzle to me, to say nothing of the three prisoners upon whose delivery my reputation was staked.

Howard's problem was greater—he still held in his arms a slight, nervous child, less than fifteen, paralyzed with fear and exposure, who had again lapsed into a state of coma with attendant convulsions caused by the sight of the authors of her sad plight.

I was not wrong when I anticipated a scene upon our arriving home. I may have been rude to Mrs. Purdue, when she indignantly and weepingly demanded an explanation. I told her there was not a doctor within twenty miles and she had better take care of her children first, and ask for explanations later. Byng did not get off so well. The "Purdue man" finally came in with a bad bump on his head, and a story calculated to excuse his desertion. He had been hit with an oar, for which I felt glad, for I saw cowardice in his face, and I always did hate a deserter.

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By the time I got my men in the hands of a marshal, and on the way to Atlanta, matters had straightened out. Mamma and Papa Purdue were quite normal again. Then it was that I thought I detected a subtle change in the atmosphere.

CHAPTER VIII

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"Tain't no tarnel use of you talking of going away now," Howard exploded, when I hinted at leaving. "You've stuck your nose in them papers of your'n every minute an' I haven't had even a chance to talk. You got away from me for five years and can never do that ag'in if I have to spend half my time on yer trail," he added, whimsically.

I spent that day with him and learned that his organization and planning were wonderful. Cabins for his men and a store for their wants, standard-gauge tracks built out into the stump land from which a giant crane plucked stumps as you would turnips and dropped them on flat cars. The plant digested stumps with relish, released the turpentine and rosin, and handed the remaining fiber, like overdone corned beef, to the beating engines of the pulp mill. A long row of cotton bales under cover waiting for a favorable market testified impressively to the general efficiency of the management.

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"An' when you told me to pull 'em out and boil 'em, I thought you was half joking," Howard would mention every now and then with the glee of a boy getting the point of a joke a day or so late.

As I came through the paper mill his schooner *Canby* was just closing her hatches over a load of paper in rolls for New York. I returned to the bungalow, sat on my end of the veranda smoking, meditating on human probabilities, when Mother Purdue waddled up from somewhere. Perhaps waddle may be an exaggeration, but as I didn't especially want to see her then, it so seemed to me. She appeared to be in an excellent humor and I was wrong in expecting a dose of refined caustic. I offered her a chair, but she preferred the log edge of the veranda against a post, her feet just reaching the ground.

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"Mr. Wood," she began rather impressively, "I wish to apologize for my rudeness

when you returned that morning. I was quite beside myself. I never passed such a night and I shudder now when I recall it. But I am indeed sorry I spoke the way I did. I know now that the children might have perished had it not been for you and Mr. Byng, and with utmost gratitude I thank you." Her lips quivered as she finished.

"I had little to do with it. I assisted Mr. Byng all I could." A billow of harnessed adipose tissue was a poor substitute for my meditations.

"Mr. Byng says it was all your work; quite modest of him. He is a wonderful fellow, isn't he?" this time facing me.

"Mr. Byng is remarkable," I agreed, looking down toward the mill.

"What are his antecedents?" she asked.

"Oh, I presume he is of English stock that settled in this country a couple of hundred years ago; his name would indicate that." [Pg 92]

"Being such friends, you must have known him long?" she pursued.

I assented without being specific.

"Isn't it too bad he has had no chance for an education?"

"I think that depends on how you define education. His accomplishments indicate a very good education. But if you mean veneer that unfits the young for hard knocks and useful effort, he is not educated."

"I really think you are right, Mr. Wood; the young men of to-day are poorly equipped, being interested only in spending money, and for the worst that goes with it," she lamented acidly. As I did not reply at once she waddled away as she had come.

Next day found the Purdues moving back on their yacht preparing to depart, as their "man" had sufficiently recovered to navigate it. When Papa Purdue came to express his gratitude for my part in the rescue of his daughters, a polite duty, there were the same subtle inquiries regarding Howard Byng. Perhaps Mrs. Potter, who also came alone, was more insistent and extended in her inquiries. She appeared to have a personal interest in Howard. I must confess that inwardly I had no use for her. The mercenary spirit stuck out all too plainly. [Pg 93]

But when little Norma came all was different. She was like a breath of fragrance from another world. One instinctively knew she meant what she said. There were no studied words or dollar signs about Norma.

Howard had something on his mind but waited until he had slept on the subject once or twice. Two days later he opened up. A distinct crisis had arrived—he was at the fork of the road, and the doubt as to which way to take was disturbing.

"What do you think of the Purdues?" he began bluntly, when we had finished our breakfast.

"I saw very little of them," I replied. "They were here but a short time and distinctly at a disadvantage, as guests, and more so by reason of the distressing accident to the young ladies. Did he try to sell you his land?" [Pg 94]

"Yes—but he didn't get far on that tack. I did jes' as you said and waited for him to do the tackin'. He had worked it out pretty well before he tackled me. He said I had the river north, east was swamp, and south I was blocked. He joined me on the west, and I had to have his land to grow. His price was foolish. I almost laughed in his face. I told him I had enough now to last for years, and that the river at low tide had three feet of water for over a hundred miles up, and that there was stump land all the way."

"Then what?"

"That scotched him for a minute. But he came back, and said he knew there was good water all the time for light draft boats, and he could go above me an' build a plant and do jes' what I was doin' hisself."

"And you agreed?"

"Yes, I told him the river was Government water and anyone could use it. I didn't tell him he couldn't do what I'm doin' 'cause he didn't know how—I jes' talked about sumthin' else." [Pg 95]

"But you found him quite a decent old chap even in trade?"

"Yes—I think he knew when he came here that I was the only one that could take turpentine and rosin from a stump, and then make white paper from what's left. He was jes' tryin' me out. An' he didn't say anything till jes' before he left." Howard got up, looked across the river, and then walked to the other window, where he could see the cabins, his cotton field, and the plant working full blast.

"He had changed then?"

"Yes—he said he wanted me to cum to New York and meet his son-in-law, Mr. Potter, a crackerjack young feller I'd like. He said he'd put in the land reasonable, and all the cash we needed to make it a big plant, get another schooner, and build a railroad out to the Atlantic Coast Line and jes' make things hum. He said we'd have a big place in New York, sell our stuff at topnotch prices, and get supplies cheaper."

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"That seems like a good offer; you must have made quite an impression on him," I ventured.

"Is that what you think?" he asked, eyeing me slowly. I ignored the question.

"Great deal depends on whether you'll like the son-in-law, Potter, and if you could work together. Now one lone man can't make much of a dent in the business world and it might be worth looking into."

"But, Wood, I'm only a Cracker now, used to the country. I don't want to go to New York, and be a cat in a strange garret. I've been there and always want to get away. The buildings are so big, every one is in such a hell of a hurry. I'm actually uneasy there. How would I feel goin' to the Purdues, with my Cracker talk and swamp ways?" appealed Byng, with a note of regret.

"Think they want you to come or they wouldn't ask you. New York people appear cold and mercenary, but once you get close, you find them human, just as warm and hospitable as any. A large city forces them into a mask they don't take off until they are very sure," I explained.

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"Yes, I guess so, but I don't understand 'em a bit," he replied with a finality that indicated little chance of his going to New York soon.

I left him in a few days without the matter being referred to again.

CHAPTER IX

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Five years went by before I again met Howard Byng. He was at the Waldorf in New York. After parting we had exchanged letters frequently and I advised him as best I could. He employed a college man to instruct him and for two years kept away from New York and other large business centers. Meanwhile his letters improved, indicating a great change for the better. Evidently he wanted to feel sure of himself before again meeting with men of large affairs. Mrs. Potter, seconded by her mother, had scored on a plan conceived when they first met Byng—the firm of Byng and Potter was now a fact and the business had expanded and prospered as expected. And more, a year before I met him again, he had married her sister Norma and sent me her photograph.

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She had, as I predicted, developed into a beautiful woman without being plagued by a self-consciousness of the fact. She was real, a superb woman indeed, and Byng was rightfully proud of her. The details of the happy consummation, covering about two years, I do not know, but I have no doubt they were very exciting—to the Potter family. First of all a huge diamond in the rough had to be polished into a gentleman, and a moneymaker, who should conserve the family fortune and add to it.

Norma was carefully educated along broad, democratic lines and carefully taught the true worth of the self-seeking contingent who amble about, and simper their way along. Her marriage to Byng was, necessarily, managed with astuteness, for at no time would anyone have had the temerity to meddle with the workings of Howard Byng's will any more than that of a lion. Undoubtedly the seed of his great love was planted when he carried her in his arms, drenched and convulsive, from Alligator Island. After his marriage I considered his status in life fixed and largely dismissed him from my mind. But it wasn't long before he insisted on seeing me, saying, that, as his godfather, I had certain duties.

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He wanted me to go to his home, but as usual I balked at this. I compromised by taking dinner at the hotel with him, together with his wife and the Potters. Potter proved to be a fine fellow. Born to the purple, he nevertheless admired the now handsome, big-hearted, transformed Georgia Cracker. Mrs. Potter had laid down her fat upon the altar of common sense.

Norma surprised me, her photograph doing her an injustice. I could hardly believe that the stately brunette, divinely molded, was the little Norma, who, five years before, I had seen limp and unconscious in the arms of Howard Byng. At that time she appeared to be all legs, arms and a shock of black hair. We spent a delightful evening, mostly recalling the incident that had terminated so happily to all concerned. Norma went home with the Potters and Howard remained to talk with

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me.

"Wood," he began with frank directness as soon as we were settled, "we want you to name your salary and come with us, we need you. In a short time we will give you an interest."

I started to protest.

"Wait a minute, now, until I tell you. I have talked it over with Potter and he wants you as bad as I do. Again I want to inform you, that whether you accept or not, you are responsible for the fact that I am better than a turpentine Georgia Cracker. Everything I've got I trace to your advice. There's plenty of room and I want you to come. This is no charity matter—you'll be of valuable aid to the business."

I found it difficult to reject his alluring offer without offending him. He pressed me for reasons. I had to tell him that I liked my work, that I was able to view the world from an eminence, my own egotism, perhaps, and that mere business would not satisfy me. Also that prospects for exciting incidents of an international character were good.

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"I was afraid you would tell me that. If you cared for money you would have used the process, secret to you and me. You could be rich," he commented, clearly disappointed. "Then you will have to continue your rôle of advisor without pay, for I must have advice from you," he added, resuming his cheerful smile.

"Only too glad, Howard, go ahead."

"I have no fault to find with the progress of my affairs since I saw you last. But again we have arrived where the road forks. Both roads invite. The Georgia Assimulating and Manufacturing plant has been much extended. It owns cotton fields as far as you can see and plenty of stump land, with transportation, and cash surplus instead of debt, but we need rail outlet badly. Existing roads say our freight is not sufficient to support a branch line, so the alternative is to build it ourselves. This will take our surplus and quite a bit of borrowed money. We're making money, but lack of a deep-water harbor hampers us. You see, we have only eight feet of water at flood tide. With a deep-water harbor we could get into the world's markets without breaking bulk, and bring the roads to our own terms on interior shipments. Our bank will underwrite the bonds. They have a man who will take all of them."

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"What bank are you with?"

"The Transatlantic. It is big, and has treated us fine," he replied confidently.

"But, you know, it is foreign owned."

"I don't know. It may be, but that is of no interest to us. If they furnish the money we need to finance the railroad connection at a decent rate, and the necessary amount to handle the business while we are paying it off, which they will, then where is our worry to come from? I don't care where the money comes from. The point is, should we take the venture, or go on the way we are now?"

"How much money will it require?" Howard fascinated me with the familiarity of his subject. He looked big enough to accomplish anything humanly possible.

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"Well—to build the road and docks, and two deep-water vessels, will call for about a million and a half. We want to own every stick and nail. We now have a half million surplus."

"You will have to borrow a million then?"

"Yes—perhaps a little more."

"You have not met the man the bank will send to take your bonds?"

"No—but the bank is reliable and will make good—at least they must produce him before we start—that's what their underwriting means," he added.

"Howard, you have put up a hard problem. I might introduce the interrogation point and mislead you. I don't pretend to know much of business, especially of big business like yours—mine is looking for deluded men—sometimes women—who try to make violations of the Federal statutes profitable. All I can do is to give you my impression, and what facts I have that may bear on your case. Then you must decide for yourself." He nodded.

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"I would like it better if you were hooked up with a straight American bank," I continued. "I mean one of the old-line National banks—but, after all, that may not be important. Perhaps you ought to let 'good enough' alone. You are making more money now than you can possibly spend. However, I can understand the lure of achievement—it's about all the real fun there is in living, without which a man is old at any stage, and would be better off dead and buried."

"That's it! You understand perfectly—make the so-called impossibility yield," he

interrupted, his aggressive nose twitching, his eyes dilating with eagerness.

"Howard, there are three crises in the average life. The first one we all know as 'getting started.' This usually happens in the early twenties. You passed yours just after leaving me on the wharf at Savannah. You say you cried and wished you were dead. Another one comes about ten years later. Its form and length varies with the individual. But for a time it's usually a pretty bad experience. Men not only wish they were dead, but would try suicide were they out-and-out cowards. They believe they will be consumed by the heat and enormity of things over which they have no control. This period is not unlike the refining process of iron ore into good steel, and its formation into a perfect-cutting, useful instrument. It is a process that is melting hot, two thousand degrees and a blast behind it. Then come the blows to make the shape; then the grindstone, and the whet-stone to put on the final polish. There is another period in the late forties that you need not be concerned about now. However, Cleveland is going to be elected—the first Democratic President since the war—and that event may disturb things for a time."

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Byng glanced up searchingly. "Go on," said he, abruptly.

"I know you didn't expect a sermon but you may profit by it now; at least you will recall it afterward, and with some relief, if you follow the trend of affairs logically. When I go after a man I want to know his age the very first thing. You are about thirty now?"

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"Yes, just about," there was in his eye a suspicion that I was raving, but that didn't keep me from finishing.

"And your wife is some over twenty—your partner a little older than you."

"Yes."

"You might do well to put up the sign, 'safety first,' though it's a lying thing where generally used. I advise that you trim sail and keep in deep water for a while. No use getting excited at your age. Let the situation be entirely clear when undertaking big financial stunts. Wait until the new President is well seated in his chair. I look for squalls."

"It may be you are right—I will give your advice serious consideration," said he, soberly, but I felt that he was not convinced.

"I don't like to send you home with a wet blanket around you, but you are too big, and have too much courage to shrink from the truth. Be governed by foresight as well as hindsight. Wait and see how the times are going to be before you touch anything requiring big borrowing. So long, boy, I must be going."

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"I knew you'd tell me what you thought," he exclaimed, wringing my hand good-bye.

I didn't see Howard Byng for many years after that.

CHAPTER X

[Pg 109]

I saw Byng's wife some three years later. I had heard disquieting news of Byng & Potter, now incorporated, but having confidence in Howard's ability to pull through almost anything, I dismissed the matter from my mind, for I was immersed with intensely interesting responsibilities of my own. Eight years' successful work in the Counterfeit Division had laid the foundation. I was now going to Europe in a more confidential capacity even than ambassadors might enjoy! The evening before sailing I was entering my hotel, much preoccupied, when I was plucked anxiously by the sleeve. It took more than a glance to recognize Norma Byng.

"I have been looking for you a long time," she began, suppressing her intense excitement. "You—you—I want to see you so badly——"

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She actually clung to me as I led her to a secluded spot in the ladies' parlor. Her excitement was unfeigned and I was anxious to learn what had happened to Howard Byng's beautiful wife. Manifestly she was in distress. Firm of step and courageous, she was still comely, but in severely plain attire. There was an absence of deep red in her lips, but the upward curves at the corners of her pretty mouth were there, contradicting the sadness and evident weariness of soul that showed in her eyes.

"Mr. Wood," she began, still struggling for calmness after we were seated, "I have fruitlessly used every means to find you, and to come upon you so unexpectedly quite upsets me. Perhaps—perhaps I was rude. I believe—I know you are big enough to understand," she said, her eyes now devouringly aflame.

I must have looked greatly perplexed, and, before I could formulate a reply, she

exclaimed:

"You are the one man Howard trusted implicitly—don't you know—haven't you heard?"

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"No, I have heard nothing authentic of him since our dinner party at the Waldorf three years ago," I managed to say.

"Oh, most terrible things have happened since then. Will you—have you time for me to tell you?" she pleaded, her hands clasped imploringly. "Can't we," she added, anxiously glancing over to a spooning couple by the window, "can't we go to some less public place?"

"It is time for dinner; if you will join me I will find a place where we will not be disturbed."

"Oh, I will be so glad! I *must* tell someone who will understand and—and maybe you can do something," she added, searching my eyes with a quick glance.

It was early evening and I was able to get my favorite waiter and alcove seat in the dining-room.

"Now, Mrs. Byng——"

"Call me Norma—please do," she interrupted, "I like the way you pronounce it, and I crave—I—I want some one to be fatherly to me—do you know, I have lost both my parents in the last three years? I—I am quite alone."

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"Well, then, Norma, food both quiets and stimulates. First, let us eat, and while we do, forget yourself, and all of your troubles. Afterward you can tell me your story—I am anxious to hear it. While we dine please relate some of the pleasant, delightful things, those for which you are thankful, that happened since I last saw you." I urged all this solicitously. I could not keep my eyes off the beautiful woman, beautiful indeed, though it was evident she had been through some terrible ordeal—the melting fires which refine, and make perfect.

"I do think your idea is more appropriate," she replied with a faint smile at my evident purpose. "It was like you to suggest it. Howard often told me you did things differently. But isn't it strange I was never asked that before?—and how sensible. Let me see—I will have to think. Perhaps, ungratefully I have never tried to enumerate them, and I might have done so with pleasure to myself." I didn't interrupt, for she was smiling now. "First of all—well, I should be truly thankful that I have good health."

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"Fine!" I exclaimed, "that's worth a million, and there's a hundred thousand women who would pay that for health and another million for your wonderful hair!"

"Perhaps so—then I have gainful employment compelling attention to others' problems which has taught me values in useful effort, brought me a few friends, uninfluenced by mere money. I should have perished without them," she added, yet inclined to revert.

"That's splendid, go ahead," I encouraged, trying to fathom the nature of Byng's disaster.

"And—I have not lost faith in human kind, and still believe the world mostly good."

"That's still greater; you will make yourself happy yet. Nothing beats invoicing our blessings occasionally."

"Then you know, a short time after your visit there came a little girl and the year that followed I could not have been happier, but——" and her lips began to quiver and she looked at me imploringly.

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"There you go: remember only pleasant things yet," I cautioned.

"That's so—that's so—well, she was christened Norma, but Howard always called her 'Little Jim'; said that was the kind of a name you would like. At the christening you were named her godfather."

"He honored me——" And recovering from the surprise I continued, "Reproducing our kind is of the greatest use, and naturally yields the greatest pleasure. Of course, you were happy? Does that end your list of benefactions?"

She struggled hard for composure. She was still delightfully unconscious of her physical charms.

"That's all I can think of now, unless, perhaps, that I still love my husband so much that the lure of men, to a lone, and, in a sense, deposed woman, is transparent and childishly laughable. This has enabled me to keep my womanhood as it should be," she added quietly, a soft glow spreading over her face. I was mystified.

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"You have some big items on the credit side of the ledger; now for red ink—but,

remember, no tears. You are brave and I don't like to see a brave woman cry. Tell me about everything as though it happened to another, and you a mere witness. Something has happened that was a part of your destiny. You will come to look at it that way later."

"Mr. Wood, you are encouraging and helpful. I will try to be brave but you will not think badly of me if I fail—will you?" she pleaded across the table, full, honest, fearless, glorious, but after all, a woman. No one could have resisted her appeal.

"I have thought of my situation so much I hardly know where to begin to make the fearful enormity of it intelligible to you. It involves business of which I know so little I have never tried to tell it before. No one would understand. I have no confidants. But I knew I would find you some time and somehow I thought it would be such a relief to tell you. I know you will understand!"

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"Begin at the middle, anywhere—I'll understand. Take your time; but recollect, this happened to someone else." I insisted, to keep her confident and resolute.

"It appears," she began slowly, "you advised Howard against the bond issue to build the railroad. He took a strong stand against it at first, but father and Mr. Potter finally wore him down and won him over. It was done. This compelled his being in Georgia for almost a year." I nodded.

"A Mr. Ramund was introduced by the bank to take the bonds and he finally came into our homes, welcomed especially by my sister, Mrs. Potter, who was attracted by the glitter of his high position in the financial world. He spoke several languages and was what many would call handsome and polished. To me he was a male person whose sincerity I doubted, but my sister bowed low and endeavored constantly to throw him in my way. I tolerated him, but soon began to look upon him as a possible source of serious trouble."

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"The railroad was built, I take it?" I queried.

"The railroad was built and cost more than expected. Howard was barely at home again when there were ominous signs in the business world that upset him. He was not the same man. Then came fearful and dreadful times. I shudder when I recall them. With the change of administration came the crashing panic. Once, during the negotiations with the bank, he told me you had warned him against large borrowing. You were right. Heavy loans from the bank were called seemingly as though part of a plan to get the property. I believe it was. Through it all Howard was kind and affectionate, except when wild, savage moods came on. He would sometimes look the way he did that morning when he carried me away from that terrible island in Georgia. In an incredibly short time the bonds were foreclosed and the bank took the plant and all—everything Howard owned. We were absolutely penniless and had to sacrifice our beautiful home for ready funds. I went to mother. Father lost everything also. It killed him, and mother soon followed."

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I was shocked at this news but silently awaited her effort to compose herself.

"Howard went to Georgia. At least, he said he was going there," she continued with an effort. "Then the serpent in this Ramund was unmasked. He became boldly insistent."

Norma hesitated. I could see that the real crux of her story was at hand. "Yes?" said I, gently.

"Urged by my sister, I went to his hotel on the representation that he could and would do something to enable Howard to regain control and finally save his property—the result of his life's labors. You can understand how I wanted to help Howard. Mr. Ramund said the hotel parlor was too public, and asked me to his suite. Obsessed by such intense desire to save my husband, and having so little worldly knowledge, I indiscreetly went. After a little talk on the business matter, this man began to offer protestations of love for me, and told me, brazenly, how much more he could do for me than a bankrupt, discredited husband. Insulted, shocked, and stunned into sheer numbness, which he mistook for silent consent, he grasped me bodily, embraced me and kissed me violently before I could recover. Then the door opened and Howard entered—quiet, fierce, determined. It seems in retrospect a part of a play. With wonderfully polite self-control he, as though requesting an ordinary favor, asked me to please run on home."

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"What happened after I left I never knew. Fearful of a great tragedy, and with a sense of injury and mortification, I walked all the way. I was actually afraid to go home. When I finally plucked up sufficient courage to do so, I found he had been there and taken little Jim. I have not heard of them since." It was some moments before she could quiet down, after her painful recital.

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"The bank is running the plant now?" I asked, turning away from the subject she had voluntarily introduced. I was through with it. I could see the villainy and perfidy behind Ramund's action. I knew what I would have done were I in Howard Byng's

place and I afterward learned that he did that very thing.

"Yes—but there is something wrong," she replied. "It does not prosper. My father's entire fortune went along with the crash. Mr. Potter returned to a bank clerkship where he was when he married sister. She blames me, attributing the disaster to my attitude toward Mr. Ramund, raved about my senseless scruples, and still resists all my attempts at reconciliation. She apparently loves only money. So, you see, I am quite alone. Do you—do you think of any possible way to find my husband and child?" she asked in whispered agony. "You know he took little Jim, then only a year old, because—because—he thought me unfit. I am terribly depressed at times for fear they may be dead. I would have found them if living. He may have done something terrible and had to go. I have tried every way within my meager means to find them. Do you think you can help me?" she implored, reaching out her hands toward me.

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"I might, but I sail for Europe to-morrow. I am compelled to go." My words sounded brutal to my own ears after such an appeal.

"Isn't there—isn't there something you can suggest?"

I meditated for some minutes. Howard Byng, if not desperate enough to destroy himself and child, would go back to the pine woods of his birth, I reasoned. Finally I said, "I will give you a letter to a friend of mine in the Excise Department, who travels the turpentine country constantly. He might get trace of him. Howard would return there if living."

"That's so. I never thought of that before. As lowly as was his start in life, he never ceased loving the woods," she recalled, brightening. "How long will you be away?"

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Knowing the disappointment the truth would bring to her, I answered ambiguously. "I hardly know. One never can tell, but I hope not very long. Meanwhile keep up a stout heart. Everything straightens out in time. Keep busy, don't brood, be brave." I will never forget how forlorn she looked as she bade me good-bye. If she had known I would be away for several years she would have broken down completely. She felt that I could help her.

I gave her a letter to Charlie Haines, and that was the last I saw of Norma Byng for eight or nine years. Charlie told me that he spent three or four years beating every pine bush in the South without results, and, moreover, that he had somehow lost track of Mrs. Byng. He decided she had married again, as she was too attractive to stay single. Eight or nine years work wonderful changes in any life. It appeared to me that Charlie might be right.

CHAPTER XI

[Pg 123]

Seemingly some people never observe the fact that the calendar travels on a non-stop schedule, and the longer we live the faster it speeds.

After my talk with Charlie Haines about Norma Byng, I spent another four years in Europe, and by that time we were up to the catastrophe that rocked the world and butchered millions of people.

It caught us short of men in all departments. I was given some odd jobs outside the regular schedule, while we were trying hard to be neutral, and waiting for the Monarch of Death and his cohorts of three-cornered, degenerate minds, to discover they had overlooked another big bet besides Belgium and Italy.

Suddenly I drew a trip to Florida. I was to attach myself to the United States' Court as an ostensible necessity, for the purpose of learning what the Boche were doing toward helping themselves to our cotton, copper and crude rubber in the Gulf by means of undersea cargo carriers, and also, if they were trying to cash in on their mortgage on Mexico.

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One morning the judge, hard-headed and practical, called me into his chambers and gave me two warrants to produce dead or alive the body of a certain man in court to answer charges of smuggling tobacco from Cuba, and violating our neutrality. He said the "Paper case," which meant the affidavits, upon which the warrants were based, were altogether regular, but there was a distinctive odor about them that indicated "a nigger in the woodpile." And that meant that if I went slow, it was believed that I would find out something worth while.

The clerk and myself studied elementary geography for a while, and found that the best we could do was to locate the defendant by longitude and latitude, either on the barren Keys, or on one of the numerous islands nearby. The affidavits appeared to be made by members of the firm of Bulow and Company, in Key West, and thither I went at once.

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Bulow and Company were big handlers, wholesale and retail, of heavy hardware, ship chandlery, and spongefishers' supplies. They had a few sponge boats themselves, deep-sea vessels, also docks and tugs. I saw nothing to justify the honorable judge's angle on the case, but took his advice and went slow.

At the hotel in Key West I met Ike Barry, a traveling man in just such a line.

"Been selling the Bulow people for twenty-five years," he informed me. "Always discount. The manager is director in the People's National. The Bulows were German—all dead now. Will take you down and introduce you to present managers—fine people. No—well, I'm going to be here a week or two fishing—see me if I can make you happy—I know what Key West has for breakfast."

I was making no progress in getting a line on the man Canby charged in the warrants. Finally I changed clothes and went down to the waterfront looking for a job as marine engineer, or anything in that line. It may have been an accident that I got on the Bulow wharf first with my license, membership card, and enough letters to convince even a doubting Thomas that I was fit and willing. [Pg 126]

I found Scotty in the engine room of a speedy gasoline craft and pried his mouth open with a hard-luck story. This boat was used as sort of scout for trade all the way from the Bermudas and Cuba to Vera Cruz and New Orleans.

Scotty soon showed his Highland Scotch by starting in to brag.

"It'll split the water faster than anything on the Gulf," said he, looking proud, "but I've got to give the Devil his due—there's one boat down here that passes us at our best, like we hadn't cast off yet, and the old man is wild about it—or maybe it's something else that's the real reason."

This was the first information I had received regarding Canby. It was his boat that excited Scotty, and I soon had the story and enough geography to locate him. [Pg 127]

Scotty walked uptown with me, and before parting said, after swearing me to secrecy, that unless things looked better on the other side he was going back home to take his old place in the Royal Navy, and that if I stuck around awhile I might have his job. In fact, there were some things about his job he didn't like, he informed me, getting more friendly before I left him.

I had to get an order from the superintendent to have the train stop the next morning about midway between Key West and the Everglades. The conductor, a veteran on the road, said he had never stopped there. As far as he knew it was a sort of a Saturday and Sunday rendezvous for spongers and thought that, without an arsenal on my person, I was taking chances. "Queer fish," he added, shaking his head, "but someone there knows something about flowers."

I wondered what he meant.

He let me off at the open back door of a rambling building of many additions, perhaps one hundred and fifty feet long, beginning near the track, and ending with two stories near the water on the Gulf side. [Pg 128]

Not a soul was in sight and everything as still as a country church on a weekday. I went through the store stocked with fishermen's supplies, encountering no signs of life, until I emerged at the other end on a wide veranda with a double-canvas roof. Here I saw an old-time darkey standing near the side rail, sharpening an eighteen-inch, murderous-looking knife on a big whetstone held in his palm.

He jerked his head toward me and double-tracked his face from ear to ear, but did not speak. Then I saw a boy of about twelve, with a rifle beside him, a hundred feet away, his bare legs dangling over the pier, which began at the veranda and extended out into the water, terminating at a corrugated warehouse that looked like a daddy-long-legs, in the retreating tide.

The boy glanced at me, then riveted his eyes on a spot in the murky water twenty feet in front of him and seemed to forget my presence. The old darkey silently continued whetting the big knife. There was something in the situation that I didn't understand. Had I struck a crazy house? [Pg 129]

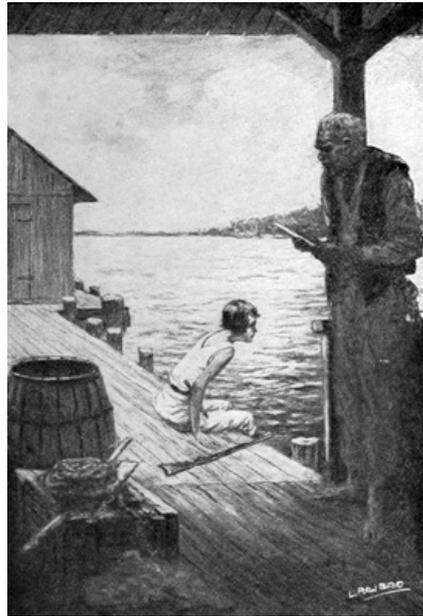
But that straight-nosed, clear-featured boy, as alert as a sparrow, was not crazy. Faded khaki pants, puckered above his knees, and a sleeveless garment of the same material pulled down over his head covered a plump, well-developed chest and body, round and sinuous as a minnow.

The negro continued to whet, occasionally trying the edge with his thumb and glancing at the boy, who continued to gaze at the water as though hypnotized.

I moved a little uneasily, clearly unable to understand. I recalled what the conductor had said about flowers and noticed that the space between the veranda and high tide, more than fifty feet, and a hundred feet either side of the narrow pier that passed above it, was a most luxuriant flower garden, planted in artistic figures. The [Pg 130]

coral formation threw an arm nearly around the warehouse on the wharf, enclosing several acres of water, protecting it from the fierce tropical Gulf storms. A smart-looking motorboat tugging at its chain completed the scene.

I became fascinated and moved over near the edge of the veranda some distance from the negro, who had stopped work on his knife; the boy's hand moved cautiously toward the rifle, a watchful glitter in his eyes; then raising it to his shoulder, fired at a spot in the water he had been watching. Instantly the waters of the little bay were lashed into a crimson foam. He had shot a bull alligator through his sleeping eye.



The boy's hand moved cautiously toward the rifle.

"That's the fellow who has been wallowing among my flowers lately. Don't go near him yet, Don!" cautioned the boy, bounding to his feet with rifle in hand, and watching his victim like a hawk.

"He's done dead, ain't he?" asked the negro, seeing the giant saurian floating on his back, his yellow belly turned toward the sky.

"Maybe not, Don. Wait till I reach his heart through the flank," replied the youngster, moving near me in order to get a better shot.

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The second aim was more effective than the first, the monster's tail lashing the deep water into a repulsive shade. He then turned belly up, inert; his heart had been pierced.

"Now he is safe!" exclaimed the boy to the negro, who was already wading out with the murderous knife and a short-handled axe. The boy then walked toward me with a frank, honest gaze of inquiry, still holding the rifle, which was fully as long as himself.

At that moment I discovered that this marksman was not a boy but a girl!

CHAPTER XII

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Shooting alligators is one thing in which I have never indulged, and I watched the show with undisguised wonder and admiration. Discovering that the little rifle expert was a girl excited me, and as she came closer she eyed me critically from shoes to hat. Then I observed that she was older than I first thought.

"I wouldn't want you to shoot at me," I said, attempting to put her at ease. I could detect a sort of distrust in her clear gray eyes.

"I never miss a 'gator, if that's what you mean," said she, toying with her rifle and reassured by my voice. "I've been shooting 'gators all my life."

"I think it's wonderful; few men could do as well."

Still doubting, she smiled slightly and continued to study my face, my tropical clothes, even my shoes.

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"Mr. Canby is not about?" I asked as I smiled down upon her.

"No, Daddy went away before daylight," and turning away to glance out toward the

Gulf added, as if reassured, "The weather is good and I don't know when to expect him." Then her innate courtesy moved her. I felt that if she raised her rifle and shot me through she would do so delicately—she could not be vulgar, her straight-chiseled nose settled that.

"Won't you have a seat?" she asked, pointing to a rustic table and some chairs worked out of wreckage which stood in the center of the veranda. I thanked her and sat down, while she hung timidly on the edge of a chair opposite, trying to account for my presence.

"Don't you get lonesome and feel afraid here all alone?"

"No, I'm never afraid, and Don is always here. At the end of the week the harbor is full of boats coming in to trade. I can protect myself. A long time ago my father taught me how to shoot with a rifle and a pistol, and also to use a knife. The knife's for sharks, though."

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"Then your father is not here much?" I ventured.

"No—lately he lets me run the store, and he goes away to buy sponges, 'gators' hides and sharkskins."

"Where does he sell his stock?"

"Well, I don't exactly know—sometimes in Key West, sometimes in Tampa, sometimes in Havana. He takes the skins and hides to the tannery. What do you want to see my father for?" she suddenly asked, looking straight at me.

I was off my guard. A man's question would have been easy. I knew that to make any progress I must satisfactorily answer that question at once, and instantly I thought of Ike Barry.

"I came to sell him some goods," I replied calmly.

"What kind of goods do you sell?"

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"Hardware and ship chandlery—from New York," I added, so that she would not ask the name of the house—as I wasn't sure what house Ike Barry represented.

"I am sorry you did not let him know you were coming, so he would have been here. We do need goods. Trade has been good lately and we are out of a great many things," she replied, much relieved at being able to fix my status. She continued, "Have you ever seen our store? We have made it bigger lately and have much more room. Come in and I will show you."

I saw danger in this. She might ask me prices. If she did I was stumped. But I walked along with her through the store, she pointing out empty shelves and enumerating articles wanted, showing a precocious knowledge of goods, but, continuing her rôle of hostess, talking freely.

"You see, Daddy makes friends with everyone, especially the fishermen, and they come here instead of going to Key West as they used to. They say we sell for less, and all on the Gulf side trade at our store. We have been a long time building up our business. Daddy is very proud of it and likes to give them good things, just what they want," she said, with a naïveté delightfully refreshing.

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I don't know why I stared at the child so long. I was somehow beginning to like her. She interested me, and I began to feel as though I would hate to find anything wrong with her father to whom she referred so affectionately.

When we started back to the veranda I asked if she had any cigars. I was dying for a smoke.

"Our trade don't smoke cigars; they want only smoking and plug tobacco, but I can give you some out of Daddy's private box; he always keeps them for himself."

From a shelf she handed me a box and insisted on my taking enough to last a while, saying that it was her treat. I was surprised to see from the factory number they were an expensive popular brand made in New York.

"Now you must come out in my garden. Daddy and I have the greatest fun with the flowers. If I didn't have them I would grow very lonesome. They are my friends and are just like nice people; they talk to me," she went on, now entirely free from restraint. Her flowers were really more wonderful than they seemed at first.

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Along the high-tide mark was a trimmed hedge of stunted mangrove trees with their ariel prop roots carefully trained into a fence; next to that was a row of most beautiful water lilies, seemingly ever blooming, as white as the soul of the girl who pointed them out with so much pride and joy.

"You see," she explained with artless simplicity, "one time our garden was nothing but jagged rocks and coral that grows to look like flowers. Don had to carry mud out

of the water to make soil before we could do any planting. That is why I wanted to get that 'gator; he wallows them down and abuses them, and Daddy says that every 'gator's hide I get will keep me in school for a month, and, you see, before long I'm going away up North to school. Do you know anything about the schools up there?" she looked up at me eagerly for my answer.

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"No—I don't know much about the schools, but I can easily find out for you," I replied.

"Oh—I hate to think of leaving Daddy here alone, but he says—I must. I often lay in bed by the window where I can see the stars, the North star, and wonder if people I will meet there are as nice as my flowers and if the great cities are as beautiful as the forests and caves I see at the bottom of the sea when I dive for sponges."

I stopped and looked at her, astonished. Evidently she divined the question I would ask.

"Oh, yes, ever since I was a child and until lately I have gone with Daddy sponging, and can stay down longer than he can—he stays longer than anyone else. Of late he won't let me go. He says I stay down too long. But I just can't help it, for I see such beautiful things down there, great ferns as big as trees, streets, parks in so many colors about which I can only dream and can't describe. I feel so happy I don't want to come up, and sometimes he has to give me oxygen to bring me to. He is afraid something will happen to me so he won't let me go any more—only once in a while, in shallow water."

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I saw the smoke of a train in the north and looked at my watch.

"I am sorry to leave but I must catch this train. It will stop for me."

It was like drawing her back from another world. Visibly disappointed, she started toward the store. "How did you get the train to stop here? It never did before. The trains run past here as though they were afraid," she said, more as audible thought. "Are you coming back?" she asked wistfully.

"Yes, I will come to-morrow," I replied. Then swung on the train and waved back at the lonely little figure standing beside the track.

I dropped into a seat, thoughtful indeed. If there was anything wrong with that little girl, her father and his business, then my years of training had been wasted. I thought of what the judge told me when he gave me the warrants. On the way back to Key West I formed a plan.

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In front of the hotel in Key West I found Ike Barry. "Ike, you sell from a catalog, don't you?"

"Yes—why?"

"If you will loan me your catalog I'll get an order to-morrow, and won't charge you anything but some smokes."

Ike was agreeable and explained the uniform discount on the catalog price as we drank at the soda fountain.

I was hurrying to my room to change back to working clothes, when I saw Scotty of the night before, in the lobby. He was in good clothes and bad liquor, or both. I tried to dodge him until I could get back in working garb but the light of recognition appeared in the little eyes under the deep shelf. He arose and stood near me. I was sure of the liquor then and it did not take long to develop the trouble.

"I had half a slant after you had gone last night that this was your lay," he began, after we were seated in a corner of the bar room.

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"It's pretty hard to fool the Scotch," I observed as he poured out Black and White, and watched me fill a glass with gin as full as the water glasses beside it. But he did not see me change the glasses and drink the water instead of the liquor.

"Scotty, you seem troubled. How is it you are all dressed up instead of burning gasoline on the blue?"

"Think I'm in bad," he said, eyeing me closely. "I've had me doots, and your nosing around settles it."

"Scotty—you saw enough last night to know I have a first-class license for the U. S. N. I have served," I continued, as he poured out more Black and White, "and can convince you I have worked as a first-class mechanic in the German and French shipyards."

"Think you did—I know you did—and all the time was using another tool on paper that went to Washington. But I believe you are on the level for all that, and I don't mind telling——"

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"Then, Scotty, what's the use of being so tight? Will you tell me something?"

"Weel—weel—maybe," with a vicious glitter as he glanced down at his empty glass.

"Tell me how you know so well where this man Canby's place is up on the Keys?" I asked, ordering again.

"I might have told you that last night, but ye never asked me, and that has a lot to do with me just now. I don't like the way things are going with Bulow and Company. In fact, I'm downright suspicious, and I'm ready to throw up me job."

"Now you're getting down to it. What do you know about Canby?"

"You see, I've been with this Bulow job near five years. Since the old man died and this manager came in things have not been goin' right. Some time ago there comes a pink-cheeked, taller-bellied chap, I never did know his name, or just who he is. The firm has always been sore on Canby, because he's been takin' spongers' trade from them. But lately there is somethin' else. And it's him you want to know about?"

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"Yes, I especially want to know about him—just now."

"No one seems to know how he got up there on the bare Keys," replied Scotty. "One morning the manager and our big-waisted pink-cheek came down to the dock in a devil of a sweat to get away up the Keys on the Gulf side. When we got opposite Canby's he ordered me to make the little bay and Canby's wharf. It was a bad place to get, drawing as much water as we did, but I got alongside the little wharf inside all right and made fast.

"The two of them looked about a bit, but no one was to be seen. They walked up to the store, went inside for a little while, and then returned. The manager said both Canby and the girl were away and the nigger was asleep somewhere. Then they began looking sharp about the little warehouse on the end of the wharf. But it was shut tight.

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"The manager asked me for a short pinch bar I always keep and I handed it to 'beer-tub.' He was fussing with it and raised his left hand to hold the padlock while he was prying with his right when of a sudden there was a shot. I could see it came from the second story. 'Beer-tub' came rushing aboard with the manager, his hand bleeding, scared stiff, like the hell of a coward he is, and ordered me to get away quick. The shot had gone clear through his fat, dumpy, soft hand like a skewer through a roast of beef. It's bandaged yet. Now what did he want there? How did he know the Canby boat, the fast one I was telling you about, was at the Tortugas at exactly that time? It was the damn girl, they said, who did the shooting—they talk of how she can split a dime with a pistol every shot at a hundred yards."

I yawned, as if my interest was at an end, and, noting his drooping eyelids, got up and walked around for a while until he could regain himself.

CHAPTER XIII

[Pg 145]

To watch the little "reef girl" among her flowers on the bleached, barren coral key was good for the eyes, and more interesting even than the startling information I got out of the Scotch engineer who had been in the employ of Bulow & Co. for five years. I believed my find so important that I was willing to buy Black and White as long as he would stand it or do anything else to keep his tongue wagging, but this was not a hard task. He felt injured, his loyalty and pride were touched—I only needed to rub the sore spots.

"Scotty, have you been discharged?"

"No, siree; I never was fired in me life," said he, stoutly, his natural caution oozing away.

"But you are thinking of quitting and going back to the Royal Navy?"

"That I am. The Old Highland is attacked, and I'm afraid by such people as this very scum that's paying me now. I'm going to chance telling ye. I begin to think there's something rotten here," said he grimly, with the stoic anger of a Highlander examining his weapons before a mêlée chancing his life. I pushed the bottle his way again.

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"Scotty, are you willing to open up?"

"Yes—try me."

"Well, it's important for me to know the movement and cargo of all Bulow and Company's ships, tugs and launches. Doing that is a thousand times more valuable

than watching steam gauges in His Majesty's Navy."

A shrewd look came over Scotty's face. He placed a bony forefinger solemnly alongside his nose and his small eyes danced in anticipation.

"Have you got a wireless on your launch?" I began.

"No."

"The big steamers have?"

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"Yes, all of them."

"Has Bulow and Company a private station anywhere?"

"I think they must have, or they couldn't know so much about the big ships coming in."

"Good! Now, Scotty, I'm going up to the Keys in the morning, and I'll be down on the dock to-morrow night looking for work again. Stick to your job and see what you can tuck in behind those lamps betimes," I said, edging out of the side door. I felt pretty sure of Scotty. My last glance into his eyes reassured me.

With Ike Barry's catalog, as big as an unabridged, the train stopped again at Canby's the next morning to let me off.

The little girl, evidently expecting me, smiled from behind a bank of geraniums—a natural, honest, sweet smile. Her face, framed by the flowers, I will remember forever.

"You see I am here as I promised," said I, saluting, and went down from the veranda to her among the flowers. She seemed delighted and held out her dainty hand.

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"I knew you would come!—and I told Daddy," she exclaimed. "He had to leave in the night again, but he told me to order everything we needed and give you the money," she said simply, with almost a sad look replacing her smile of welcome, at the same time watching the train grow smaller and smaller as it sped toward the Everglades and the Northland, as much a mystery to her as the life to come. Then she resumed digging about the geraniums.

"How were you guided in laying out your flower beds? There is a disorder about them that finally appeals."

"Oh, yes; I understand what you mean," she replied after hesitation. "Well—this end looks like a little room in Nereid." Her eyes were dreamy as she straightened up.

"Nereid—Nereid——" I encouraged, "why, Nereids are of the sea. Belong to Neptune. Is that why——"

"Maybe so; Daddy named it and he has good reasons for everything. He knows so much."

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"But you didn't tell me where Nereid is."

"Oh, yes," she replied absently, as if arousing herself from a dream. "Nereid is in the water,—a heavenly place. I found it about fifty feet down. It's a great, big cave with an entrance so small that even after Daddy blasted it with a 'terror' I could only wriggle in."

"What is a 'terror'?" I asked, wondering if she was really dreaming or was possessed of a delightful talent for romancing.

"That's one of Daddy's inventions and we sell lots of them to the spongers. It's a stick of dynamite with a grabhook on it so it can be fastened to most anything and not wash away. A wire is attached so that it may be fired from the boat after the spongers come up. I will show you one inside. You see," she explained, "rocks and coral down there are in the way of getting the best sponges."

"How far is the Nereid?"

"It takes the *Titian*," said she, looking at the big launch at anchor beyond the warehouse, "about an hour to go there. You know, the bottom of the sea is much more beautiful than the land—the land around here anyway—it's even more beautiful than my flowers. It has great valleys, cliffs, caves and forests, all kinds of varicolored trees, all for the fish, and the sponge divers are the only people who ever see them. Daddy says one place is five miles deep. Oh, I would like to go down there, but I can't."

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"Tell me more about Nereid. I am anxious to know."

"Oh, yes. After I could get in we got the most wonderful sponges and I would hand them out to Daddy. We went there for months and I was glad. I love to go and always hated to leave, for it was such a beautiful place. You see, I got so I could stay down

longer than Daddy and the sharks could not get in and so I would just rest. Sharks are bad here and we have to keep moving every second or they attack. I could see a light there, but it was not like the sun. It made everything in the cave so bright and I could hear music at times that made me dream. It was heavenly. There were gold, green and other colors I can't describe, the sides and roof looked like diamonds and colored stones I never saw before. The long halls and rooms farther back I was unable to enter."

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"Your father was never able to get into Nereid?"

"No; that's why he won't let me go any more. I would stay so long he would have to give me oxygen to bring me to. Then the beautiful things and music would become plainer and I hoped I never would come out. I would imagine I was in the North country about which Daddy tells me, where you live, where everyone hears sweet music, thousands of voices singing, a long way off but plainly. I—I thought my mother was among them. I imagined I saw rows of wonderful books, and pretty pictures, beautiful women, and grand-looking men all dressed up who knew everything—isn't that the way things are in great cities, with fine houses, tall buildings that reach the sky, and beautiful parks?"

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This question was asked pleadingly, revealing a deep longing for the big world outside, a world of mystery to her, "but maybe it was only a dream," she added, with a plaintive little sigh.

"Yes, the world is full of good men and women and beautiful things, if we see them rightly," I replied, as I walked beside her to the steps of the veranda, marveling at her simplicity. "I think you must have a wonderful father," I concluded, as we went up the steps.

"Oh, he is indeed; we talk so much about everything and especially about the time I must leave him and go to school. I will be so lonesome for him—I do so love my Daddy. But if you are to get that train, the same as yesterday, I will have to hurry, as there are a lot of things we need to order."

"Why does your father go away so early? Does he do that every day?" I asked, getting Ike Barry's catalog and opening it on the veranda table.

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"Yes, about. You see, several years ago he had an accident. A shark charged him just as he was coming up, tired, to rest a moment. I saw the shark just in time, dived and ripped him open with my knife but he got Daddy's knee in his mouth, anyhow. It was so stiff he couldn't swim much and he wouldn't let me go down alone. So we added to the store and got more goods. Then Daddy persuaded all the sponge men to fish for sharks and porpoise, and shoot 'gators, the hides and skins being worth so much more now. Then, instead of selling them green, he started a place away up the country in the woods, where he tans and then sells the leather. Then he buys sponges and sells them, too. That's what keeps him so busy. I will show you some of the leather down in the warehouse when we're through. I'll go and get the list of goods Daddy and I made out last night."

I was puzzled indeed. This child was frankness itself. She, very likely, talked and thought in the same terms as her father, from long and constant companionship. There was no evidence of anything to conceal. I felt sure he was not smuggling or in contraband trade. As I walked about the veranda, waiting for her, I noticed for the first time what appeared to be a very old and battered wreck, barely visible, lying behind the coral reef that protected the little harbor.

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"You have had a wreck here, I see?" I observed enquiringly, as she returned with the list.

"Oh, yes. That's been there longer than I can remember. We have some awful hurricanes at times coming in from the Gulf, and as they come up so quickly the spongers get caught once in a while," she replied, taking a chair opposite me at the table, ready to read her list. "That's why we need such fast boats—to race for shelter. My boat, the *Titian*, is very swift. I can even pass the *Sprite*, Daddy's big, new boat. You see, he gave me the *Titian* when he got the *Sprite*. The *Sprite* is much bigger, but I can beat it," she chatted, laughingly recalling the fun they had racing.

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I started at the first page of Ike's catalog, and ended up at the last. The little thing gave me a long order, I was afraid too much, amounting to more than they would be able to pay. But I was mistaken. When through she asked me to tell her how much it was. It took me a long time to total it for it was new to me. I told her it was over four thousand dollars, watching for a big surprise.

Not so. She staggered me. She got pen and ink and made out the check Canby had signed and gave it to me, also shipping directions; when I looked at the check it was on one of the very large banks in downtown New York.

But my hardest work was to come. I wanted a peep in the warehouse, that interested Bulow and Company so much, and was afraid she would forget her promise to show

me the sharkskin leather. But she didn't. She got a key from the store and as we walked down the wharf she talked of the North, and how she longed to go to school, every time coming back to the fact that she hated to leave Daddy.

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Once in the warehouse, I discovered it was much larger than it appeared from outside. What I saw amazed me. Sharkskins, tanned as white as snow and soft as fine kid, were piled, with various sizes together, higher than my head; porpoise, as thick as elephant's hide, were stacked to the cross beams. Tanned alligator hides, arranged also in sizes, filled half the warehouse. There must have been tens of thousands of dollars' worth. Keenly delighted at her father's achievements, she told me about each kind and for what purpose they were used.

In one corner were a lot of tanned sharkskins individually rolled and bound securely with sisal cords. They seemed extra heavy as they laid there in a big pile. I passed my hand over them. Evidently they were wrapping something very heavy, ingots of lead or copper.

"That's the way he ties them up for shipping so they won't take much room," she volunteered, noting my interest, and I wondered if she was as innocent as she seemed of their contents.

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"Do you feel safe with such valuables around? This warehouse is only corrugated iron," I suggested. My intention was to lead up to the visit of the Bulow boat, and the subsequent shooting.

"Well"—she hesitated as though recalling a discussion with her father—"the fishermen are all honest. As rough as they are, they would not take a pin. We have never been bothered at all, except once—just lately."

I encouraged her by arching my brows inquiringly.

"One morning I was in my room that faces this way, cleaning my rifle. Don was over on the other side of the reef skinning a 'gator I had just shot, when I noticed a big cutter swing up with three men. Two got out and came in the store. I was going down at first, but somehow I stayed at the top of the stairs and listened. They talked awfully rough, and at the same time were looking all over the place. They went out to the warehouse and the fat man tried to pry off the padlock, and kept on trying. I didn't want to hurt him, but he had no right to break in, so I shot him through the hand. I hoped I had just frightened him, but blood spots were found on the wharf after they got in their boat to go away. Father said I did just right," she ended, in a dubious tone.

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I now saw the train coming, and had to hurry, telling her I hoped to see her again. As I swung on board she stood watching and waving her hand with a longing, wistful expression.

CHAPTER XIV

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Riding back to Key West I run over in my mind all that little girl had said, even those matters to which she vaguely referred. Something about her face and manner had made a deep impression on me. I felt I wanted to help this wonderful little flower girl, blooming out of the bare reefs of the Keys, having the appearance of the serrated edges of an immense alligator tail extending out of the Everglades into the Straits of Florida. There was always the possibility, it seemed to me, of its moving suddenly any time, throwing Key West and all the rest into the Gulf of Mexico, or over into the Bermudas.

Ike Barry, of the big heart, was astonished at my good day's work for him, and wanted to reciprocate. I told him to hustle the goods on promptly and that would be enough for my time and trouble. Then I inquired:

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"Who is the pink-cheeked, deep-waisted Teuton individual—the comparatively new addition—is he part of the mystery about Bulow and Company?" I asked casually.

"Mystery is right!" he replied softly. "I don't know for sure. Wasn't much interested, in fact. I think it's like this. When old Bulow died the business was incorporated by the heirs, and then this fellow shows up with a big say, executively. The manager jumps when he sneezes. The change didn't affect their credit and that's all that interests me. However, I can find out easily enough, and will let you know."

"Do that, Ike, and I will call it square for getting you a new customer," but that night I found a hundred good Havanas in my room. Afterward I put on working clothes and went down to the dock to find Scotty. He was working on his engine, the cylinder heads off, getting ready for a big run the next day. I fell to and helped him, enabling me to better examine the cutter—and talk with him. Scotty was covered with sweat,

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grease and indignation.

"There's something coming off to-morrow, and it beats hell that I can't find out just what it is. This boat goes out to-morrow and I don't go with it, for the first time. A greasy piece of German cheese from one of the big steamers is going to run her so what in the devil do you suppose they are up to?" he asked, wrathful and caustic.

I looked surprised and glanced about.

"No, they're gone now but they've been working on her most all day. Do you see that plate bolted to the deck aft? They think they're fooling me, but that is a base for mounting a five-inch gun. They put that in place to-day. Now, why do they want a gun on this craft? And rifles were brought aboard. They're here now; want to see 'em?"

"All the English and American cargo and passenger ships are mounting guns for defense now," I suggested, but he shook his head negatively.

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"This is no cargo boat. She's less than a hundred feet over all. We only take a little freight to fishermen at the Bermudas and bring in hides and sponges. We don't go where there's submarines. No—there's something else and I believe it has a lot to do with this man Canby. They're bitter against him. The manager and that tub of tallow, with his left hand still in bandage, was aboard this afternoon. I couldn't hear all they said and they talked German, which I don't understand much. I did hear Canby's name and hear 'em swear. I tell you they are up to some devilry."

We adjusted the gasket, replaced the heavy cylinder head, and began bolting it down, both silent for some minutes.

"Scotty, what else is it that makes you think there is something wrong in the wind?" I asked, thinking hard as we worked.

"Well, why don't I go as usual? Why do they put a Boche in my place and order me to look after repairs on the ocean tug? And why do they want a five-pound gun and rifles? They're going to call at the Tortugas and then cross the Gulf—to Galveston or New Orleans. There's no submarine there. The fat party and two or three others are going. The cabins were fixed up to-day and a new cook is shipped."

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"You couldn't hear what they said about Canby?"

"No, but I'm sure they are watching him; they know what he does every day. He's very slick and either knows too much for 'em or is beating them to something. And 'beer-tub' is a muckle sore about having his hand punctured."

All the unanswered questions Scotty asked struck me between the eyes at once. What did the manager and an executive of Bulow and Company want to see in Canby's warehouse? Was it the beautiful leather, or something else for which they were willing to "break and enter"—committing a felony—to see? Why were they mounting cannon and taking on rifles if their object was lawful and peaceful? And why did they want a crew strictly Boche? Scotty noticed my silence and looked over anxiously.

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"Scotty," I asked quietly, "do you know that, outside of gold and a conscience, the Boche needs copper, rubber and cotton, in the order named, more than anything else?"

"That they do."

"Think it over. Copper from Mexico, or any Gulf port in the States. The same of cotton, and the biggest rubber port, Campeechy, across the straits. It is possible you have overlooked or forgotten something. Has any of Bulow's ships, tugs or barges handled anything like that? And that, just now, might mean a Dutchman's one per cent, besides loyalty to the murder trust, in getting that kind of merchandise into Germany through Sweden?" We both worked swiftly as we talked, running down the nuts on the cylinder-head studs.

Scotty, under his breath, began heaping curses on himself as a bonehead, and tried to take it out on the wrench he was using. I waited till he subsided.

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"Scotty, you know the *Deutschland*, a cargo U-boat, has made a few trips to northern ports and that a sister sub they never mentioned is known to have left for this side. Is it possible Bulows have something to do with it? And that everything the Boche fails to say is just as important as what he usually lies about?"

"Yes, but damn it, man, it don't come easy for me to go back on them that pay me."

"I know, Scotty, but it ain't treason to fight a German. He lies just as easy as he ruins young girls, or mutilates prisoners and wounded men. Their hearts, throats, teeth, eyes and hands, the very marrow of their bones utter lies perfected for fifteen hundred years. Think it over, Scotty," I said, wiping my hands. "I am going up to the wireless station and will be back in about two hours."

"Don't you think there are some good ones?" he asked, looking injured, evidently

shocked by the memory that he had trusted some of them.

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"Yes, Scotty, a few who left Germany because they hated it, but to be born and to grow up in Germany adds a virus to the blood that is bad. It can be neutralized about as easy as black can be made white. You can't expect to rival them in general crookedness in a thousand years' practice. They're about to hand you something."

He threw down his wrench wrathfully, wiped his hands, and followed me up on the dock.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked, his head hanging.

"If there is another man in the Bulow service you can trust, get me some information, but mind what I have told you about trusting a born German. They revel in deceit and dirty, treacherous lies. When I get back I'll tell you what I want." Instead of Scotty going back to work I saw him go down the wharf where the ocean tug was tied up, but I was not quite sure he was convinced.

I went to the wireless station and the information I got from Washington was mainly satisfactory, but a long way from completing a more or less nebulous theory, pointing to something big.

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Coming back past the hotel I found a note there from Ike Barry. It read:

"The big money in Bulow is supplied by the Transatlantic Banking Company, New York. The fat party represents them."

When I got back to the dock Scotty was working listlessly. Didn't seem to care if he never got the cutters ready to go out, and looked thoroughly disgusted.

"What have you dug up, Scotty?" I knew I had him. My appeal had sunk in.

"Not a blessed thing. I thought Jim Wheeler, the assistant engineer on the tug, could tell me something, but he's gone. The crew's all sauerkraut now. I'm sure Wheeler is on the level."

"Well, drop that now and pay close attention. I have a plan. It's a big bet, but I am going to make it if you will help. When does this cutter leave in the morning?"

"Eight o'clock."

"And how long will it take to run to Tortugas?"

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"She can do it in two hours easy."

"That will bring her there at ten. Scotty, she must not get there till twelve, or even later. I know what they are doing at Tortugas. How can you fix it?" I asked, giving him a strong eye bracer.

He shrank as if stung. Scotty's inherited fealty to an employer was touched. It was one thing to talk, but his nature balked at acting. He looked down at the cutter as a lover, then across to the ocean tug that had replaced all hands with German born. His eyes finally came back fighting and his hands closed viselike, struggling with himself. Now was my time to drive in the nail.

"Scotty, there are some kinds of fire you must meet with fire, however much you hate the job. This is one of those cases. If I am right and can pull this off, it will mean millions upon millions for the Stars and Stripes and it's now only a question of days when we will be at war with Germany, too."

"Are you sure of that?"

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"Yes, as sure as hell! Are you going to help me?" I shot this at him in a rasping whisper.

"I didn't say I wouldn't," he finally blurted, "but I don't know how."

"Give me your hand," I said, grabbing that greasy member and shaking it firmly. When a Scot shakes hands on a bargain he's safe.

"Now, Scotty, have you taken gasoline yet?"

"Yes."

"How much?"

"Three hundred gallons."

"Scotty, don't finish your job on that engine to-night. Let the new engineer adjust and time it after you finish in the morning. Then just before you come off slip this little ounce package in the gasoline tank."

Scotty grinned for the first time. "Will that do it?"

"In about half an hour his trouble will commence. It's a trick I learned in German

shipyards."

Scotty grinned again.

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"They think they know it all, especially about machinery, when, as a matter of fact, everything they have is stolen. It's their perverted, thieving ego, Scotty. They even murder more efficiently than anyone else."

Scotty laughed outright. "I wonder if they will have a different kind of hell or heaven?"

I felt sure of Scotty now, so I said, "Scotty, they know nothing about heaven. About hell, what they don't know now they will learn when America gets in the game. This very case may be the one to bring us in."

Scotty started to yell but I put my hand over his mouth. "Anyhow," he whispered, "I got one whoop coming to me later—eh?"

"You have, Scotty—stick tight, all ears and eyes, and no tongue." He stood grinning after me as I went my way. "I'll see you soon," I said in parting.

CHAPTER XV

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For a long time the Transatlantic Banking Company, which I have mentioned on several occasions, puzzled me. I wondered if it was truly a big bank, and why it should hold an interest in Bulow and Company. My suspicion was that it might figure in the matter at hand as it did in Howard Byng's affairs fifteen years previously.

That point mystified me. It took a long time to reason it out, although I was looking for the cloven-hoof in banks, and even governments, and I did believe that the Kaiser had been planning a world conquest ever since he tucked France's thousand millions into his wallet and went away with his chest out.

I did believe that the Germans nourished and practiced morganatic marriage, the well-spring of most all forms of concubinage and degeneracy, liberally imported to New York and all other large cities of the world—the tap-root of the social evil. The entire German royal crowd are sexual degenerates. We allow the male as well as the female of this species to enter respectable residential sections, social clubs, and churches, there to rub elbows and even kiss with their scarlet lips girls and boys, thus encouraging further acquaintance with their kind of "morality."

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We can see all that now, but I, like millions of others, didn't fall for its enormity until actually struck by lightning, so to speak.

The Kaiser's coterie had started out to seduce the world, and came with a clean, pink face. Kultur, music, art, science—frequently stolen—a stab at literature, and a big display of substance—money—were used as wedges. They began as the libertine always begins, by cloaking themselves as respectable. Hell's reward is ashes, bitter, acrid, scalding ashes, slow in coming and sometimes at the expense of blood and millions. Adjectives, adverbs and qualifying phrases have lost their power to convey a conception of the underground system of the Hun.

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While we dislike sermons and smile sometimes at our own moralizing, and hate bristling, pregnant facts, nevertheless we have faced a wall of them, and it remains to be seen whether we smash it, thereby letting in the noonday sun, or shall walk cowardly around the truth to further plague ourselves and generations to come.

I took the early train to Canby's place next morning, convinced that Bulow and Company's cutter was going out on an expedition that meant harm to the little girl's father, whom I had not met. I wondered if his delightful daughter, whom I had learned to venerate, would allow me to use a motorboat so I could go to her father. I found myself thinking of her as an "oasis on a barren Key." Of how much self-interest was concealed in that who shall be the judge? I mean the possibility of excitement, lure of danger, of serving and making a record with the Government which signed my vouchers. This child would become a valuable witness. I recalled what the old judge had said about the odor the papers gave off to him—white paper and ink can give a terrible stench to our sixth sense if one has the nostrils to detect it.

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I walked through the store and came out on the big veranda, only to see her hurrying in from among her flowers. Coal-black Don was sitting on the wharf, bareheaded.

"Mr. Wood, I knew it must be you because the train never stops for anyone else!" she exclaimed, naïvely, coming up and offering me a delicate but firm little hand. "Is there something wrong? Are we going to get the goods? Daddy was so glad I ordered them and is planning on them."

"He started early for the Tortugas and will not come back till late. I tried to keep him here, and out of the water, but I can't. I know he is diving again. I can tell by his red eyes when he returns. He talks about doing it so that I may go North to school, and makes me forget how hard he is working by telling me how much fun it is, and how he made a dummy man for the sharks to charge at. As soon as they bite at it a torpedo goes off and kills them. He says that long before he gets old he will really quit, and we will be so happy together."

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"But I want to see your father this morning; in fact, it is important," I insisted quietly.

"Is it very—very important?"

"Yes, it is very important." I'll admit I lacked courage to tell her why, for it seemed a pity to disturb her delightful state of mind.

"I could take you out there in the *Titian*, but my father would be displeased if it were not something very important. I never did that before," she said, coming closer and eyeing me fearlessly.

"Your father would not be displeased. He would say you were the bravest and best little girl in the world." She had apparently been taught to obey and never thought to ask why I wanted to see him.

"Oh, I will gladly go. I love the water and the *Titian* is so fast and seems to love it, too," and with no more ado she called to Don to bring the *Titian* alongside the wharf and take off the cover.

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The negro slid off, turtlelike, into the ebb tide and waded out to the boat, which he soon made ready for the trip.

The girl felt for her shark knife, to be sure it was there, and went into the store and got her rifle. "Daddy says for me never to go out without a rifle and a shark knife, as I may need them any time," she explained as I looked on wonderingly.

"He says, with a shark knife, rifle, some 'terrors,' an oxygen tank and a good boat, there is little danger," she volunteered, somehow thinking it necessary to reassure me as we walked to the power boat now ready for us.

The boat evidenced a feminine touch. Painted, varnished, brass shining spick and span, as would the engine room of an ocean liner. Perhaps thirty-five feet over all without a cabin, though there were bunks for two in the bow ahead of the steering wheel protected from the weather by a cowl over which the little girl could just see when standing. The shining, six-cylinder motor, with up-to-date starter and reverse clutch, was in the center at the bottom of an open cockpit extending clear astern, surrounded by seats under which was closed storage space.

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"You see," she said, placing the rifle in a convenient leather holster under which hung binoculars, "we used this boat to sponge from for a long time, but since Daddy got the *Sprite* and gave the *Titian* to me I have changed it some—and painted it up to suit myself," she added, as the motor sprang into life at her touch. The cutter moved instantly toward the entrance of the little bay and out on the Gulf into a slight head wind.

"Better come up here under the cowl, for she throws a spray after she gets full headway, even if there is no sea," she warned, not moving her eyes from her steering course and glancing occasionally at the compass in the miniature binnacle.

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I took a seat on the side opposite her, protected from the spray as the *Titian* eagerly reached ahead. The craft seemed vitalized by her presence, and sped like the wind over the long swells now coming head-on from somewhere out in the great Gulf.

She charmed me, standing there at the wheel, on the opposite side of the cockpit, receiving the spray on her boyishly cropped hair—a baptismal glory. She was a picture with her perfectly shaped, natural feet, plump but sinuous legs bare to the knees, brown arms, remarkable chest, chiseled nose and chin, and a wonderfully calm, seraphic face, delighted with the exhilaration of motion and speed. Her great thought was that she was performing some big service for the father she loved so much. The picture will remain with me forever.

"How long will it take to get there?" I finally asked, thinking of the possibilities in Bulow and Company's movements. My intuition had flogged me to suspect certain happenings during the previous night, after I had parted from Scotty. Notwithstanding a good night's sleep my suspicions were even yet strong within me, and I actually prayed that results would spare this child from a knowledge of the savagery of the people with whom I was likely to deal.

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I was positive that harm was meant to Canby, when and where was the only question. But why did they want him?—why the warrants? Why their visit to his warehouse?—and why their cannon and rifles, and other paraphernalia?

The child finally seemed to come out of a delightful reverie. She glanced back at the

motor, whose every valve, spring and cylinder was humanized—biting eagerly in answer to her will.

"If Daddy is where I think he is we will reach him in another half hour; it's only about twenty-five miles from here and the *Titian* behaves well. She knows she has a guest aboard," she added with a smile.

I looked at my watch. We would arrive there a little after twelve. If the little Scottish engineer had not failed we would be there in time, and then I could have another laugh at my ominous premonition that counseled such extreme haste and energy.

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Finally I saw the little girl's hand leave the wheel, and reach. I watched her take from the leather pocket a pair of glasses and raise them to her eyes, meanwhile steering with the other hand.

I am willing to admit a thrill of relief when she exclaimed:

"There he is. I can see the *Sprite* now, I know her, as far as I can see—her lines are so different."

I arose hastily and peered in the direction she indicated. She handed me the glasses. I could but faintly discern the boat, but we were traveling so fast I soon made out a trim motor boat about as long as the Boche cutter, evidently anchored to the leeward of one of the straggling coral formations of the Tortugas group. I swept the sea, but at that moment could see no other vessel. She must have noted my relief as I returned the glasses.

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"I was sure I could go straight to him. I haven't missed it much," she said, clapping her hands delightedly. "You see I wasn't two points off where he is anchored," she added, changing her course to bear directly down upon him, the spot now easily visible to the naked eye. Anticipation of the loving welcome she would receive beaming in her happy face.

My exultation did not last long. I detected something moving in the sea beyond the island. I reached for the glasses instantly to assure myself that my imagination was not tricking me. Without a possible doubt the Boche boat was coming up toward Canby's boat, shielded by the little island.

Scotty's work had delayed them some, but not quite enough. Heavy forebodings again possessed me as I watched the boat stealthily approaching. Screened by the island between it and the Canby boat, it dashed forward at express speed. The *Sprite* was manifestly at anchor with no signs of life aboard. No doubt Canby was diving and the Boche had selected that moment in which to strike.

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CHAPTER XVI

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Living this episode over again, I labor with the inadequacy of any combination of words to describe it. I saw the Boche boat bearing down like the wind upon the Canby boat—its intended victim. I was now positive, and I exulted in mind that I had Bulow in the toils. I was witnessing an overt act. But I hoped it would not bring harm to the child, such a slight bundle of charming girlhood. I cannot describe my feelings as the Boche boat, on evil bent, came swooping down from one direction and we from another with no chance to arrive there first. And if we did arrive ahead of them how could we contend with a five-pound cannon which I knew they had mounted the day before?

The little girl's face portraying unalloyed joy suddenly changed to apprehension.

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"Why, there is a big boat heading directly for the *Sprite*. I wonder what they want? It is very fast, too!" The child grasped the wheel firmly, glanced again at the motor, which seemed to throb with increased eagerness as it dashed into calmer waters on the lee side of the island.

"Why—why—that looks like the boat that came to our wharf when I was alone, and I had to shoot—oh, Mr. Wood, it is the same!" exclaimed the girl. "What can they want?—I can't see Daddy anywhere. He must be diving and may not come up until after they get there. I can see them plainly now; there are several men on deck, all looking at the *Sprite*!" she exclaimed, with a little cry of pain so foreign to her, a cry of the wounded—soul-depressing, pleading.

She glanced at the motor behind her, as if to urge it on to greater effort. As we came up I could see now why the *Sprite* was speedy. The little girl and Scotty both had said she was very fast. She was built like a scimitar, her graceful lines showing above the water, as she bowed, queenlike, to the slightly undulating sea, tugging gently at her anchor.

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We were now within half a mile of our goal, and the Boche boat had stopped short like a rearing pair. They were now within a few hundred feet of the Canby craft and swung broadside, coming to a standstill with reversed engine. This was instantly followed by a puff of smoke that bespoke tragedy.

"It is the same boat, and they are shooting at the *Sprite* with a big gun!—they are trying to sink it!—Daddy must be diving!—I cannot see him!—He would shoot them all if he were there!—Oh! Oh!"—and she beat the wheel of the *Titian* frantically with her delicate hands as if to drive it faster. As they drew closer another cannon shot boomed above the quiet sea like a knell of death.

At that instant the little girl's face changed to that of a raging woman of fearful determination. Her eyes burned and glittered, a wild fierceness unseated her gentle youth and femininity.

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I don't care to witness such fierceness often—it's terrible to see in human beings. The delicate, innate, refined child disappeared, and the calm, stolid determination of a maddened woman came to view. I shall never forget this picture—it was sublime. She instantly planned.

She steered past the bow of the *Sprite*, scanning futilely for signs of her father, then brought up with reversed engine within fifty feet of the Boche boat, and asked me to hold steady there. In an instant she had lifted one of the seats, grasped something, and disappeared over the side as smoothly as a seal.

Two men on the Boche boat came to its bow to see what was going on, but, being unarmed, I made no move, divining what she was doing. I could hear three jubilant voices; a shot hole in Canby's *Sprite* was visible just above the water line. They knew it had passed out below on the other side. One of the men shouted, "She is sinking!" then added, "Better give her another shot to make sure." Then came another order to get the rifles ready for Canby "when he comes up." As if suddenly realizing there might be danger in a launch stopping so near them, three or four men faced about to look us over.

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I recognized among them at once the thick waistband and heavy jowl of the leader—and, yes, there was the bandaged hand just as Scotty had described.

"What's this?" he said in perfect English. "We can't leave anyone to tell tales. We'll take no chances. Better swing around and give this one a shot, too—the rifles will not sink her.

"What do you want here?" he asked insolently, when he saw me trying to shrink up to invisibility under the cowl of the *Titian*.

I did not have time to answer, for a thin hand grasped the other side of the boat and the little girl came over the side holding the ends of a double insulated wire. With the savage gleam in her eyes she then without hesitation applied the two ends to separate poles of the battery. This done, she looked directly at the Boche with the bandaged hand, not more than fifty feet away, who stood much puzzled by her appearance from nowhere.

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A fearful explosion immediately followed that carried the bow of the enemy ten feet in the air, falling back instantly as though seeking the quickest route to oblivion.

This, then, was the effect of the "terror" her father had invented!

Her face gave no sign as she started the motor and drew alongside the *Sprite*, now but a short distance away. It was taking water in the cockpit aft as it gently rolled in the sea.

She jumped on board, went to the half-inch down line over its side which she knew led to her father working below. She tried it for weight, as he might be coming up. Not being reassured by this, she stood up in the boat and began filling her lungs. Her wonderful chest expanded to deformity before she went over the side with the down line as a guide. I knew she was bound for the bottom of the sea to rescue her father, and such terrible determination would get him, dead or alive. To one underneath water a cannon shot above is a stunning blow.

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After she was over I watched the Boche boat that was surely sinking, bow down. The Huns were all below, evidently to determine the extent of the damage. Not being anchored, their wreck seemed likely to drift away.

I jumped from the little *Titian* into the *Sprite*, to note the damage of their shots. One had evidently missed, but the other entered above the water line, and being deflected, passed out on the other side, at the water line. I thrust a piece of waste in the jagged hole and noted she had so far taken but little water.

When I looked again for the Boches they were out on deck working frantically over the single lifeboat and were swinging it out on its davits. Craven fear had now replaced the jubilant insolence of a moment before.

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I sprang back into the *Titian* and took the girl's rifle. At a short distance I am fairly accurate and I sent three bullets through the bottom of the light metal lifeboat. I wanted these men, they having actually committed a crime in the territorial waters of the United States. By getting them and their boat I might have the key to a violation of international law.

I called upon them to surrender or I would shoot to kill. The man with the bandaged hand and great paunch was an easy target. Dazed and chagrined at the turn of things, they stood for a moment in silence. Then followed loud talking and swinging of arms, as if accusing each other.

A panic seemed imminent among the trapped fiends, three of them went below; the cook, still clothed in white, and the engineer in greasy overalls, ran to the lifeboat, shoved it off into the sea and tumbled and plunged in after it. One began to row frantically while the other railed at those left in the sinking boat. I did not need them so bad, and without this lifeboat I was sure of the rest.

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Evidently attracted by the dropping boat, the remaining three rushed back on deck, shouting curses, and shaking their fists with rage at the two in the boat making frantically for the coral island.

Their boat, with bow under, stopped sinking, evidently held up by water-tight compartments amidship and aft. Without a small boat or an engineer, I felt sure they were mine, though I knew there were rifles aboard, and the five-pounder might be brought into action if the escaping engineer was not the gunner.

As the three went below again I jumped back into the *Sprite*. The down line evidenced life and big air bubbles coming to the surface assured me that the little girl, at least, was safe. But the least neglect in watching the movements on the Boche boat was very dangerous. I knew that deviltry was certainly being planned.

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CHAPTER XVII

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Those few minutes seemed hours. I was vitally anxious to see that close-cropped little head above the water. I stood on the deck of the *Sprite*, with rifle in hand, ready to fire.

I was conscious that the down line slightly moved, but did not dare look too closely. The tide was bringing the Huns a little closer, and all depended upon vigilance.

I was right in expecting a rifle barrel to show over the edge of their boat. It came cautiously to view. I drew down on the spot, and the instant a hatless head was raised enough to aim at me I got it. The rifle fell back, discharging in midair. I knew that one Boche was done for. The rest might be deterred for a time, but they were bad men in desperate straits. Instantly I brought another cartridge forward. I knew I was an easy mark standing there in the open. However, there was no other attempt. They evidently had enough. I glanced at the down line. It was still moving; and I knew there was life in the sea below.

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Then I saw a small hand grasp the boat's side and heard a long gasp for air. With one hand I helped her drag a heavy-bearded man aboard, to all appearance dead, then with rifle in both hands I resumed crucial watch of the Boche boat. I noticed her as she detached a heavy cord from his belt, fastening it deftly to a cleet. Spongers fasten their baskets to themselves that way. I knew the little girl, though painfully struggling for air, was working rapidly. The Boches were cowed enough for the time being. I glanced at her. She had a big cushion under her father's stomach, and was putting her whole weight on his back and chest at regular periods.

She soon seemed satisfied and placed the oxygen mask upon his face, after taking several long drafts herself, and she then continued to bear her weight upon his chest between breathing intervals. She had told me that both she and her father had been resuscitated in that way many times, and as soon as she had regained somewhat normal breathing she began murmuring words of endearment, a sort of an incantation, hypnotic in its effect.

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"Daddy—Daddy, dear, can't you hear me? You are coming to now. You will be back with me in a moment. Can't you hear me?" She would lean over and speak into his inert ear, softly at first, then pleadingly.

In a moment there was an exclamation of joy that made my heart jump. It was from the child. She was almost hysterical, now that her father showed signs of regaining consciousness.

"I knew you would come back, Daddy. I am here. Don't you know me? This is little Jim. I came to get you. Daddy, you know me now, don't you?" she pleaded joyfully,

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her face lighting as victory neared, her movements quick as a sparrow. The determined fierceness of a few minutes before I could hardly comprehend.

The name, "Little Jim," gave me another distinct thrill. Somehow she had never told me her name and I had never asked. I was contented to know her as "little girl." But when she mentioned "Little Jim," evidently a pet name, as a charm to bring her father back to life, the name of Canby took on a new significance. It was as though a window in my memory flew open as I recalled that the schooner on which Howard Byng used to ship paper to New York was named *Canby*, and probably was the old wreck thrown up on the coral reef just outside their little bay.

I could not tell in hours what happened in minutes then. At best I can give but a poor impression of the fierce intensity of the situation.

Suddenly a new question arose in my mind. Where did Canby get those ingots of lead or copper, wrapped in sharkskins? The fact that Bulow and Company wanted to destroy him flashed through my mind. That I had caught the Huns "with the goods" was all I could really think of then. My theory was working out. It moved me to instant action. I must get those men—the bulky man with a bandaged hand and the two others—alive. Stupendous things depended on it. Danger meant nothing to me then.

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The Huns still kept out of sight, with no attempt at gunnery. I heard a deep moan in the bottom of our boat, as of one coming out of an anesthetic, augmented by the delightful endearments of the little girl.

"Oh, Daddy, I knew you would come back. Don't you know little Jim now? I am here to take care of you. Now you know me, don't you?" I glanced to see that he was on his back and she was kissing his forehead above the mask in frantic joy, a most remarkable filial demonstration.

"Is your father out of danger?" I called to her.

"Oh, yes—he is breathing the oxygen regular now and knows me; he will be all right soon. Can I help you?" she replied joyfully. "He has been that way often. So have I, when sponging."

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"I must examine that boat yonder before it sinks. I want some heavy cord."

She looked about for a moment and spied the cord she had taken from her father's belt and tied to the cleet. She unfastened it and began pulling it in, but she could raise it only part way. I took the rifle in my right hand and assisted her with my left. In a moment we brought up an ingot of copper.

"Daddy must have used this to carry the line to the bottom," said she, but I thought of the heavy rolls of sharkskin leather in the warehouse. She removed the cord and began winding it about her little hand into a hank.

"Now, little Jim, I am going to use your boat to reach that wreck. Time is important. Has your father a rifle aboard?"

"Yes," she replied exultingly. "And here it is."

"Now, I know you are a dead shot. While I start the motor and get our boat over to the wreck, keep it covered."

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An anxious glance at her father reassured her. He was breathing the oxygen regularly.

"I can do that. Shall I just scare them?"

"Unless they come out with hands up, instantly shoot to kill," I replied positively.

She brought the rifle across the gunwale, resting on one knee in the cockpit, her body tense and alert. Her steadiness was inspiring. I knew then that the man I most wanted, the man with the bandaged hand, would know I was protected, for he had already tested her marksmanship.

A moan came from the reviving father drinking the life-giving oxygen.

"Yes, Daddy, I will be there in a few minutes. Breathe the oxygen deep and you will be up soon," she called to him affectionately, at the same time gazing steadily along the rifle barrel trained upon the Boche boat.

"Is there another 'terror' in the *Titian*?" I asked as I stepped into the boat and pushed off.

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"Under the stern seat," she replied, without taking her face from the gunstock.

I started the motor of the little boat, swung around and came boldly down upon the sunken bow of the Boche boat, fastened to it, and took a position just in front of the cabin. There was no sound of life inside.

I called to them to surrender and come out with hands up or I would dynamite the wreck and send them to Hell there and then.

This order started muffled voices inside, but with no apparent inclination to obey.

I repeated the order, and added, "I will give you just one minute to line up or be blown up."

This last information produced animation.

I looked back to the *Sprite*. Little Jim's eyes were gleaming down the rifle barrel like an avenging angel. The game was big and I was after it.

The man of big girth came first, having to wriggle his way out of the tiny cabin door, and stood facing me with his hands elevated as far as his fat would allow. Then appeared another middle-aged, medium-sized man, of a business-like appearance, who looked like a decent person caught in bad company.

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"Where's the other one?" I demanded.

"He's dead," instantly replied the man with the bandaged hand.

"I want to see him," said I, far enough away to use the rifle.

"I say he is dead—inside," the fat man replied in rather a surly tone.

"Bring him out where I can see him," I demanded, not moving. "You bring him out," I added, looking at the thin man.

Frightened and craven, he let his arms down, went in the cabin. He returned soon, dragging out a body covered with blood. My shot must have hit him fair.

The thin man then took his stand beside the fat one, and elevated his hands again without an order, and both looked across at little Jim and her deadly rifle.

"Who are you?" demanded the pudgy man with the bandaged hand. "What right have you here?"

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"An American citizen arresting a criminal caught in the act," I said, proceeding to put the "Yankee Bridle" on his wrists behind him.

"You needn't tie us up like slaves. We are gentlemen," he urged stoutly, but I ordered him to keep his mouth shut, which he did.

I then ordered the two men into the stern of the motor boat and applied the same "Yankee Twist" about their ankles, fastening the two of them together. The other man appeared dead.

I searched out and tossed into the motor boat everything of a private nature, including some expensive hand luggage, afraid the boat would sink.

I left the dead man on board and started with my prisoners at full speed to where I thought the engineer and cook had possibly landed in the riddled lifeboat.

I could soon see them lying on the beach. As I approached they started away.

Running into the shore as close as I could, I fired at them, and they stopped. It didn't take long to get and tie them up with the rest. Without arms, on one of the barren coral islands that compose the Tortugas, they knew they had no chance of escape.

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I then returned to the wreck, taking the lifeboat in tow. Small air compartments in each end prevented the cutter sinking entirely, but it had drifted away from the anchored *Sprite*, on which I could see little Jim moving about. Turning my attention to the "dead" man, I found the bullet had hit him so high on his forehead it did not enter his head, but had ploughed its way under the skin, the shock causing insensibility. Drenching him with sea water soon developed signs of life, and it wasn't long before he joined the sullen crew in corded harness, his head bandaged the best I knew how.

CHAPTER XVIII

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Definitely deciding the big Hun boat would not sink, I let the anchor go, pulled the little lifeboat aboard and plugged the bullet holes, for I knew I would need it.

The Gulf sun was pretty hot and I didn't blame the Boches much when they called for drink and food.

Their cook, a flabby tool scarcely full witted, possessed a craven fear of going into the next world. I released him with a forcible injunction that his first tricky move

would send him there instantly. With knocking knees and gibbering to himself, he went about feeding the others.

I saw little Jim moving around on the *Sprite*, so concluded matters in her quarter were satisfactory. I had to go over there and I felt sure of what I would find. I hesitated, however, for it was a delicate situation. But it could be put off no longer, so I got into the little lifeboat and drew up alongside.

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With a grimness of a lion playing with a cub little Jim had coaxed her black-bearded father back, and given him food and dry clothing. Though still very weak he was sitting in the bottom of the boat, leaning against the tiny cabin, evidently pleased with her wheedling and caresses. But when he got a good look at me I thought his eyes would jump from their sockets. At first there was the fierce, savage look of the enraged Georgia Cracker, which as quickly melted into a joyful delight as his memory served him.

Little Jim ran to the side of the *Sprite*, grasped me by the hand and led me to him. "Daddy, this is Mr. Wood. If he had not come to-day what might have happened!" she exclaimed, manifestly undaunted by the dreadful experience she had undergone.

Though full bearded, with black hair like a lion's mane, there remained that wonderful aquiline nose and powerful jaw and chin of Fighting Howard Byng. From where he sat he slowly reached up a broad, generous, strong hand.

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Little Jim thought the emotion he showed was in recognition of the service I had rendered him. But as our eyes met we both understood—to little Jim his name should remain Canby—sponge diver, merchant and Gulf trader.

"Little Jim, your eyes are good and so is your aim. You watch what is going on over there while I have a talk with your father." Then I explained to her that the cook was commissioned to feed them food from his hand, as their own hands were serving another purpose just then.

Without hesitation she took her rifle and sat down in the stern, letting her legs hang over—the same picture as when I first saw her sitting on the wharf waiting for the tide to uncover the bull alligator.

Howard Byng sat there devouring me with his eyes, recollections rushing through his mind. I seated myself beside him. He seemed to want me close to him.

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"I was sure I would see you again, but I never pictured it this way," said he, turning his face toward me. "I would have drowned if you and little Jim hadn't come; the cannon shot put me out—it is a terrible shock under water."

"An active life has many surprises," I answered slowly.

"You've been at it all the time! I would rather be able to do what you have done to-day than to have all the money in the world. I recall what you told me the last time I saw you. That mere business—mere money would not satisfy. I could not see it then."

"You have made headway. Starting with nothing, not even a name," I said, so low that little Jim couldn't hear.

"Yes—I have done a little. First I had to work to live, and now little Jim is all I work for. I—I—suppose you know—all about it—how it happened?"

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"I don't know much about it, but I want to. Just now we both have something important on hand. I must get these men moving north as soon as possible."

"Little Jim tells me you landed them all. I wish I could have helped. I can tell you something about them. I have known it for a long time, but—but you know my position is a little peculiar. But I didn't think they would try to kill me."

"Howard, just now I want to get the Boches and the cutter into port. I think the boat's bulkheads will keep her up."

"Will she answer to the rudder?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Then I can tow her in this boat; I can pull a train of cars," he said, brightening.

"Can you? The cutter is a wreck. If you pull her in she's your salvage."

He smiled for the first time, though he still labored for breath with which to speak.

"I've been doing a little in that line for some time," he said, moving his foot toward an ingot of copper. "That's why the Bulows wanted to get me, and I guess they would have done it this time if it hadn't been for you." He spoke grimly, taking the oxygen tube and drinking deeply from it. "I'll be ready for anything in a few minutes now," said he, and with considerable effort he stood up and looked across at the wreck like an eagle ready to swoop down upon its prey.

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"Where do you want to take it—Key West?"

"No—just now I would rather hide it and get the prisoners up North quickly."

"I can take it where it can't be found in a hundred years," he said, looking over his engine.

Little Jim still watched as we raised anchor to get under way. He, or rather little Jim, towed the Hun cutter. I ran the *Titian* and followed. I wanted Washington to get their eyes and ears full before the Boche interest heard of it. I had started something big and needed help.

Byng hid the Boche cutter in a basin among some small islands, and ran for his own place not far away. He tied up and was waiting for me, fully recovered, the powerful, robust man of the sea. Six men were an overload for the *Titian* and we couldn't keep up with the *Sprite*.

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Howard didn't pay much attention to me until they were lined up on his little wharf.

I didn't like the way he stood there, eyeing the fat man.

He would not come close, seeming to fear that he might harm the fellow if he did. He appeared to be struggling to restrain himself and succeeded pretty well. I thought it was because he saw the bandaged hand that little Jim had punctured when trying to break the lock of his warehouse.

He grew into the fierce Georgia Cracker again, whom I had seen stand up and offer to fight a whole camp of rough surveyors—but more intense if it were possible.

I started over to him and asked, "Where can I keep them until a train comes going north? One is due in about three hours."

"It don't stop here," he said, never for an instant taking his eyes off the big man with the great girth and jowl.

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"It will stop for me, and before it gets here I must search each of these fellows down to the very skin."

His mind was working like a whip. Without replying he turned on his heel, went into the store and returned with a key to the warehouse.

"They were so anxious to see the warehouse, we will satisfy them now. Keep them in here," said he, unlocking and throwing open the door.

The big man was exhausted. He dropped in a greasy heap on a pile of green hides. When I cut the cords he could hardly get his arms forward. His wrists looked bad.

I began with the cook. Made him strip before me and I examined each garment critically, removing all personal effects, putting them in a package, carefully marking his name and address on it so that they would be restored. This gave me an excuse to ask a great many other questions. Each man, when searched, was carefully segregated from the unsearched.

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Howard stood by eagerly looking on at the thoroughness with which I proceeded, using leather from valuable skins with apparent indifference, to tie up their effects.

The thin man proved to be the manager of all the Bulow interests in that section. He had considerable cash on his person and indignantly protested that I was high-handed in the whole procedure. It was an outrage some mighty power would avenge, he insisted vehemently. At that time the Boches actually believed that when they pulled the proper string some twenty million Germans would rise in defense of the "fatherland," but I never saw it just that way.

The fat man with the bandaged hand had revived enough to show great interest in my procedure with the manager, evidently hoping that they two, as dignitaries, were to be spared the indignity of being stripped and searched.

It took more than an hour to get to the wilted tub of tallow. His white flannel trousers and delicately marked shirt, expensive Panama, and shoes were badly mussed by the ruthless treatment accorded him while in the boat, and also later on when he came in contact with the salted hides. Brain heat or dandruff had cleared away his front hair. He did not look at all lovely, but, having rested, was full of fight. His attitude was that of a maddened bull, his murky eyes like a pool of filthy sewage. When finally he stood stripped before us I glanced at Howard. His attitude was alarming. He looked like a lion ready to tear its prey limb from limb. I couldn't understand at first. Gradually a great light dawned in my mind—but there were things I was not supposed to know about, as yet, so I turned my gaze upon the prisoner.

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"I refuse to submit to such treatment!" he hissed from between lips now repulsively purple. "You have no right to treat even common prisoners in this way—dogs—damned Yankee dogs!" he let out, sitting upright now. "I represent great interests. I am an officer in a large bank. You will pay dearly for this!"

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Howard stood some distance away from the frothing Boche. His eyes scintillated fire of extreme hatred. His fingers clenched and he took a step toward the man, then hesitated. The situation was tense. I was afraid he might do a rash thing. At last I made reply to the fellow.

"It is my right and duty to make a prisoner safe for transportation," said I. "If you don't remove your clothing for examination I shall do it forcibly, and I don't intend to wait long, either." I spoke quietly, now watching Howard also.

Then I went at the rebellious Boche and flipped open his belt, starting, with little delicacy, to undress him. When he saw I meant business, he relented and began working at his own collar.

The manager, who had donned his clothing, came from among those examined and asked permission to speak with him.

"If you come one step nearer I will shoot you dead in your tracks," I warned. "Tricks like that won't work. He is going to do what I tell him in exactly the manner I want him to," I said, forcibly enough, taking up a rifle leaning behind me.

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Howard moved in front of the manager, like the sturdy oak he was, grand, powerful, magnificent, able to cope with all of them unaided. The last hope was gone, so the undressing began over again. Piece after piece the fat Boche tossed upon the floor in front of me, in rage and unbroken spirit, affecting an air of grandeur that intimidated condign punishment for those to blame for this terrible outrage on his person, and had to be prodded again for the belt he wore next to his skin.

It seemed to me that Howard would devour him with his eyes as I scrutinized his silk underwear and returned it after a careful search.

I took everything—watch, trinkets, money and wallet, returning only his clothing, the belt being retained for more deliberate examination. I have spent most of my life studying men and women, but this man's case mystified me. Dressed again, he looked a good deal of a personage, undoubtedly forceful, and a power among men. But his shrunken legs and flabbiness of muscle I could not understand, nor could I comprehend Howard's consuming interest in him. The fact of his having tried unlawfully to "break and enter" Byng's warehouse, only to get his hand bored through by little Jim, was not enough. He was a prisoner now for his morning's work. I could not resist the impression we get of certain females, not women, who, barren themselves, hate children, and kiss dogs.

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Well—perhaps I did wrap his personal belongings with more care and formality than I did the others.

"What name, please?" I asked, poisoning my pencil.

He looked at the manager and did not answer readily.

"Forman—Charles Forman," he finally blurted.

"That's a lie!" came from Howard Byng as clear as the sound of a church bell. "His name is Ramund—a damned Prussian!"

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CHAPTER XIX

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Howard and I patched up the bow of the Bulow boat and a Government vessel came and took it away to an Atlantic port, with the five prisoners also on board. This was safer than the trip by rail and I was much relieved thereby.

I was instructed by wire to remain to note the effect and pick up additional information. I was glad as I wanted to get Howard's story and account of his doings during the last fifteen years, since I left him in New York, a rich man with enviable surroundings and prospects.

He insisted that I make my headquarters with him, placing little Jim's swift *Titian* entirely at my disposal.

He was just the same likable fellow he was the last time I stopped with him, up in Georgia. He was most attentive, and always anxious for my safety when I went away, even for a short time, but I had to wait several days before he was ready to talk.

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An alien enemy custodian took charge of the Bulow affairs and marines were quickly planted on all their ships and tugs before they could be damaged. In fact everything was working well, so I was in no hurry, and awaited a convenient time for my heart-to-heart talk with Howard.

One afternoon little Jim took Don marketing in the *Titian* for fruit and vegetables up

on the mainland of Florida, a small matter, to her, of sixty or seventy miles. Howard busied himself tinkering about his big boat, the *Sprite*, getting it ready for sea, myself an interested onlooker.

"Howard, are you sure you are doing the wisest thing by going on this way?" I asked as soon as I saw he was through with the job on hand.

"You mean going by the name of Canby?"

"Yes."

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"Well—maybe not. You know I never took Canby as a name. They—the fishermen—just gave it to me, and for a long time it suited my purposes. I wanted to get away from everybody and everything and if I had planned it deliberately it could not have come out better. But little Jim's future bothers me. She can't stay here much longer; she has got to go to school somewhere, and she, girl-like, wants to go up North, about which I have told her so much in order to amuse her when little. What do you think?" he asked, again the simple Georgia Cracker.

"It will be pretty hard to advise you without knowing more of the circumstances," I said, dropping down on a seat in the cabin by a porthole.

He dropped his tools, came in and sat on the other side, throwing off his hat. His long black mane was turning slightly gray at the temples, but his body was sturdy and powerful.

"I never before felt as though I could talk about it, and don't believe I could now to anyone but you. I think it would be a relief to tell you because you have known me so long and understand so many things," he said, filling his pipe carefully and lighting up. He leaned back, crossed his legs, and looked keenly the friendship he felt for me.

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"You know," he began, in wonderful self-restraint, "it takes a long time to get real, cankerous bitterness out of a man—me anyhow. I think it was you who told me that hatred, malice, and revenge were the three arch enemies of peace of mind and development. Wood, I have remembered that, and am glad I have made some progress, but I suppose I am like everybody else. I think my trouble has been the worst. I believe now that if I had followed your advice and not borrowed from the Transatlantic I could have kept my property, but I would have to go through some kind of a melting fire to be made into good steel. No doubt, the family trouble would have come in some other way." I arched my brows, appearing not to understand.

"You, of course, recall, for I know you don't forget anything, the last talk we had in the Waldorf in New York," he continued. "You advised me to sit tight and let good enough alone. That night, and for a day or two, I thought you had grown over-cautious and conservative, and had entered the class who hold up their hands and cry be careful, be cautious; but never do a damn thing for themselves. But I soon began to see that way myself, and decided to let things be as they were. Mrs. Potter took the lead against me. That name I have never pronounced since then, till now. It sounds strange to do so. It seems like recalling things to memory that might have happened when I was on earth at some former time. Mrs. Potter, as you well know, was my sister-in-law, my partner's wife, and while the family stood well socially, she had a great ambition to be at the head of the Four Hundred. She wanted to be worth millions. She not only filled Potter with it but won over her father, and with all of them against me I gave in and the deal went through. I am satisfied now the Transatlantic Trust Company plotted to acquire the property. The panic played into their hands, enabling them to call our loans, without which we could not run or pay the interest on the bonds. They took snap judgment and foreclosed as cold as a cake of ice, kicked me out, and Byng & Potter, Incorporated, was theirs. I had a card up my sleeve that would have brought them down, but this blackleg Ramund extended the robbery to my home and wrecked that, too."

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Howard stopped here, filled his pipe again and looked at me appealingly, apparently waiting for me to arrive at the true significance of his quiet statement of fact.

"Ramund, Ramund, you don't mean to say——" And then, as though shot between the eyes, I recalled the same name and the peculiar cultivated inflection given it by Norma Byng some twelve years before. Now the cause of his extreme interest and agitation when we were examining the prisoners a few days before rushed upon me like Niagara. I could still hear Byng's cut—"It is a lie, his name is Ramund—a damned Prussian!" It was strange I did not remember the name then, especially as both times it had been connected with a foreign banking house.

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"Yes—yes," said Howard, taking his pipe down and looking out of the cabin door reflectively, "don't you think I have made some progress to be able to even talk about it now without becoming insane? I am trying to tell you of a snake that has crawled across my path twice to destroy me. You know that don't happen often. I should have killed him the first time. I would have done it had it not been for one thing. I can think of it now—but I never dared to before. I couldn't tell anyone but you, even now! You seem to support me."

He stopped, puzzled by the expression on my face as the details of my meeting with Norma Byng, his wife, years before, rushed through my mind, and the dreadful sadness with which she told me of the same occurrence. Her simple story impressed me with added force after the lapse of time. By gesture I asked him to proceed. The fact was I could see valuable evidence for the Government, too, in the circumstances.

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"As I said before," he continued slowly, "I had an opportunity and would have killed him, if he had not been secretly encouraged. I can see now I was all but insane when they not only took our properties, confiscating even my private account, leaving me without a cent, but I had to sell my household effects to live. Then Mrs. Potter started on another diabolical course. She deliberately undertook to sell my beautiful wife to the Prussian—and was making headway before I noticed it. It took me a long time to realize it and I was sure of it before I acted. I went down to Georgia to get old Don, the only man I ever entrusted with the full details of how the turpentine and rosin could be taken from a stump, bringing him back to New York with me.

"Their scheming, now in full swing, was working well. One day I was told that my wife had gone to Ramund's apartment. Desperate, I went there, intending to break in the door, but that was not necessary. In his cocksureness and insolent bravado he had not locked it and I entered. I heard him tell her how much more he could do for her than a bankrupt, discredited husband who could be easily removed. No protests came from my wife. Her silence was consent enough. I was as cool as I would be hunting for bob-cats. He took her in his arms, kissing her passionately. She did not resist and that was all that saved his life. I told her to go home, showed her out and locked the door." Byng buried his face in his hands for a moment, so I waited silently, until he began again.

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He took her into his arms, kissing her passionately.

"He was a full match for me physically," said he, wearily, "but my sense of injury was so burningly intense that every muscle was as though laminated with steel wire. I felt a strength that knew no bounds. Fear and prudence had departed in the presence of this home wrecker. Almost my first blow knocked him senseless, but such a punishment, even if I had killed him, seemed mean, small, dreadfully inadequate. Instantly it occurred to me that undesirables should be unable to reproduce their species. Desperately, perhaps insanely, I used skill acquired in the pine woods. In a sense I was protecting little Jim and performing a service toward the world." He looked at me appealingly, but went on with his story.

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"I went home immediately," said he, "but my wife was not there. Deciding she was unfit to further care for little Jim, I gathered a few things for the use of both of us, took my child and left within an hour.

"Though desperate and irrational, a part of my mind worked with method. The first schooner I ever had, the *Canby*, was considered too small and worthless to be put in the mortgage. But for old time's sake I had kept her anchored in a safe place and well looked after. I got old Don, took the *Canby* and started somewhere, I did not care a damn where, except I wanted to get away."

"You came south, of course," I ventured for the sake of saying something.

"Perhaps it was the attachment we all feel for our birthplace that made me steer south," he assented. "In a short time we ran into bad weather, and for what seemed an interminable time drifted with bare poles. To make sail was impossible. How we ever navigated down the coast, through the Straits, into the Gulf, I have no rational idea. All I can recall is that I took great care of little Jim and that anything else did

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not matter.

"One morning we fetched up here on this beach, so high that in low tide the *Canby* was on dry sand. Her bones are out there now, sacred to me."

"I would imagine so," said I absently, thinking of the scoundrel Ramund.

"But I did not feel that way the morning I came ashore, carrying little Jim in my arms," he continued. "It seemed as though the *Canby* had added the last drop, the dregs of misfortune, and had deserted me. I shook my fist at it, but resolved to fight on for little Jim, old Don's faithfulness being a ray of hope.

"We first made a house tent of the sails of the *Canby*, which we gradually built permanent. I took to sponging to provide for little Jim, and I guess you know and can understand the rest," he finished, struggling with the emotion his whole body expressed.

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The sacred solemnity of this powerful, magnificent man, baring his very soul to me, impressed me profoundly. We remained silent until I could control my voice. Finally I asked:

"Howard, have you heard anything from the North since you came here?"

"No—not a word. I have not met a soul I ever saw before until you came. For years I didn't want to. And then a desire to see some one consumed me. You may think it strange but I was too big a coward—a downright coward. Somehow I always thought you would find me. I knew you went to the ends of the earth and sea, and that you would eventually come. That's why I didn't seem surprised the other day when I recognized you. When little Jim told me there was a salesman to sell me goods I never suspected, but I should have known you would not come with a brass band," he replied, greatly relieved at having unloaded a burden he had carried for fifteen years.

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CHAPTER XX

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Rehashed departmental reports become mere braggadocio when the human interest is lacking.

I had written perhaps one of the most vital chapters in American history. So far as the department is concerned it will remain unsung. My reward is in knowing I did it.

Its direct results were the taking over of ships, needed more than money, and the appointment of a custodian of alien enemy property to confiscate hundreds of millions of dollars' worth, expelling the Hun and his kin from our frontiers and our industrial life for all time. Though Howard was well past want, I felt for him. I suspected he was even affluent again—you can't keep such a man from making money, even on the barren Keys. I felt sorry for his wife, Norma Byng. Little Jim had wound herself about me as had her wonderful father who sat silently in the cabin of his boat looking wistfully at me. Maybe it was because he made me her godfather and called her little Jim I felt that the child was partly mine.

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Howard, scourged into bitterness, was possessed with an inflexible conviction that his beautiful wife had betrayed him. I had to be extremely careful. I must wait for him to see the light as though from within himself. Assuming a more cheerful attitude again, I asked:

"Howard, have you heard absolutely nothing of what has been going on outside? I mean about your private matters."

"No more than if I was on another planet until now, when this man appeared in my life again," he replied emphatically, "and you came as I knew you would. And—and—well, you can see how I am fixed. How can I tell little Jim my name is not Canby? How can I explain to her that the fishermen named me Canby after the wrecked schooner, and I let it go at that because I was practically insane for several years. You can see how much she is to me now. I have been mother and father to her since she was a year old. We are so near one, it makes me a coward, I tell you."

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"Life has certain responsibilities, Howard, we can't escape; perhaps you have arrived at another turning point that calls for the big part of you."

"Maybe so—maybe so—I can see now that you will need me as a witness against these men. Our country is involved. I guess I must come out, at least part way, from my isolation for that reason, even if it kills. It's no time to slack against our Government," he said, more as an audible thought, giving me my cue.

"Howard, you are right, your old English ancestors have never shirked when their country needed them. They fought in the Revolution, they battled with Indians and

Mexicans, in the sixties they grappled with their consciences, then later they went after Spain like tigers, and now old Georgia is sending its best blood in hordes against the Hun with a whoop and yell that cannot be mistaken. Even if they do like to moonshine a little they fight for their country and that is the last and best test."

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His eyes glittered with a new kind of fire. I knew I had him.

"Have—have you been up the river—I mean where the plant is—where we got the moonshiners that time?" I could see all that grew out of that incident now flashed through his mind at the mention of moonshiners.

"No—but I have inquired several times. The land is raising cotton but the paper mill is not running. I believe they have made no headway with the stumps. All in all, it's not doing very well."

"Thought so," he replied, intensely gratified, "I could feel it," he added, "and what has become of those that were my people?" he asked with effort.

"I haven't had much information for seven or eight years, except this man Ramund turning up. Potter went back to clerking in a bank. His wife has soured on the world in general and taken on acid fat. The old folks died."

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"And—?" His pipe was laid aside and he held himself viselike and looked the vital question.

"She is estranged from her sister and living quietly."

"Did you—have you seen her yourself?" he asked coldly.

"Yes, a long time ago, she was still beautiful, making her own living, but, Howard, I believe—I know she is a good woman." I decided I could not tell more then.

The effect of this information was magical. Though his eyes took on the fire of the fierce Georgia Cracker, I believe he was ashamed of it. He arose and walked out on deck and looked over the Gulf. It was about time for little Jim and Don to return. Finally he returned and sat down. He was learning to conquer himself.

"Wood—am I doing anything wrong—am I violating any law in robbing that wreck?" he surprised me by abruptly changing the subject.

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"You mean where you have been getting those copper bars?" I asked, somewhat amused as the subject had never been referred to directly.

"Yes."

"No; on the other hand, you are doing a patriotic duty. If a wreck floats, Uncle Sam is interested, but at the bottom, getting is keeping. But, Howard, that is something of which I want some details. I have been waiting for you to tell me. It's mighty important in this case."

"I know it is. That's why I asked. The sunken submarine explains mostly why Bulow and Company want to get rid of me. You see, I had been a thorn to them for some time, for I had been taking the spongers' trade. They have been loading vessels ever since the war with such material as copper, cotton, and rubber. When they could not fool the British by shipping through the Netherlands, they sent cargo subs. They advertised one coming to a northern port, but that was just to cover more extensive operations down here. Bulow and Company picked up the stuff from all the Gulf ports. One was about loaded out there by the Tortugas. Word was received that a Yankee destroyer was coming, so she submerged to lay on the bottom until it left. But the destroyer was attracted to the spot by the gulls waiting for possible food, and let go two or three depth bombs, for luck. The sub never came up. I located her in twelve fathoms of water. You know, a dive without a suit lasts only four or five minutes, and it was a hard job to get her open, but I did finally, and have been taking copper from her ever since. The whole thing is there yet, dead sailors and all."

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"When Bulow and Company learned that I knew of the wreck and suspected I was salvaging that settled it. I had dangerous knowledge. They wanted the wreck themselves. If I can get all that's in her I'll be worth more money than I can ever use; even a small ship loaded with copper and rubber has an immense value. Now do you understand why they decided to sink me without trace? I never told little Jim just what I was doing because I partly promised her I would not dive any more, since the shark bit me on the leg and she saved me; and, again, little Jim is so innocent and frank, as I want her to be, I was afraid she might let it out."

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"And you thought Bulow and Company was too strong for you, so you never gave the Government information?"

"Yes, they have been powerful enough to keep me from getting goods except in a roundabout way and at high prices, and have run everything else down here to suit themselves. They felt they owned everything, and, as you see, became very bold. How could I, without even a name, beat them except by strategy? I wanted the

copper and other things I could salvage, so kept as quiet as possible.

"When little Jim told me about a salesman from a New York house being here I was glad, and told her to buy, but I never fell for your stunt, though I often thought of you. I believed as formerly Bulow and Company would prevent the shipment even for cash in advance, they are clever at managing such details as that. I understand they have the Government's wireless and telegraph code besides their own men inside that service."

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"But you got the goods I sold you?"

"Yes, every item. Little Jim says the prices were much better. And, more, the railroad did something they never did before—they stopped the freight and unloaded them right at the back door." Howard laughed outright for the first time. "How could I tell who it was? But, as I said, I might have suspected something like that from you."

"Howard, is this sunken submarine intact?"

"Yes, entirely so as far as I can see. The crew seems to have died suddenly. There are two openings in her—one at the conning tower, that lets you into the engine room and crew's quarters, and a small hatch, more of a manhole, pretty well forward, which opens into the freight hole, evidently a separate compartment as it had not filled. The great water pressure held it shut. I finally got in. There is wonderful value there. I don't wonder the Huns want it. Once in the crew's quarters was enough. It has filled and is not a very pleasant place to go. I am used to about everything in the water when sponging, except dead men."

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"How many of the crew are there?"

"Well—I counted about twenty, but there may be more, and if you saw them you would not think they were dead. One man stands up with his eyes open in a listening attitude, the wireless man is before his instruments, and the rest sit about perfectly natural. It seems as if the captain knew they were done for and turned on gas or something that killed them instantly."

"Howard, we can get those bodies, can't we?"

"Yes, if we go there fixed for it, but it won't be such a delightful job. I shut it so the sharks wouldn't enter."

"I must have every one of them, and every piece of paper in her, the cargo don't interest me with the exception of a few samples."

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CHAPTER XXI

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While I was willing and eager for Howard to benefit to the limit on the salvage there were certain things I must have if they could be found.

"Howard," said I, "did you find the captain's strong box? There must have been some money left if his cargo was incomplete."

"Yes—I got one box. There may be more, but, as I said, I can stay under only four or five minutes, which is not long to hunt, and dead Huns sitting around as if they were going to speak to you do not make a very pleasant audience, but I locked it down and she is just as clean as when sunk and the water is pretty cold there."

"What was in the captain's chest?"

"Well—considerable money. I have all the papers and will give them to you."

"Howard, why do you never use a diver's suit when you go sponging? Others use them."

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"Yes, I know they do, but I have always worked alone. That is, little Jim and I. In fact, I would not trust anyone to pump air to me but her and she is not strong enough. However, I would trust you and I can get an outfit to go down for what you want, and maybe we can find a way to get the stuff up faster."

"I have got to have every scrap of evidence in that wreck. If in getting that I can help anyway I will be glad. You must bear in mind we have to be speedy. This man, Ramund, and his crowd being sent North as prisoners will start something. It's a fair bet that they have influence enough to be admitted to bail, the bank with which he is connected furnishing that in almost any sum. They will try to protect this valuable cargo laying down there and prevent us getting the evidence it will yield. And the Huns will be well prepared when they come this time."

Howard meditatively arose and walked out on the deck, but he returned again

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eagerly.

"This is the off-season for sponging. I believe I can charter a brand-new schooner of four or five hundred tons. *Anti-Kaiser* is her name. She has a new and complete diving outfit, besides pumps and everything for raising spongers who get sunk; she has been coming here for supplies."

"How soon can you know?"

"To-night or to-morrow morning."

"That's settled then; get her as soon as possible. I will see what I can do about getting a gun or two to mount on her, and a gunner. Bulow and Company are not going to lay down so easy."

"I know where the *Anti-Kaiser* is anchored and we will go there as soon as little Jim comes back," he replied, as only Howard Byng could, eager and unlimbered, and ready for big game.

"There she is now—I thought it was time," he added, hearing her laughter as the *Titian* rounded the point into the little harbor and came up to the wharf beside us. Little Jim was sitting as a queen surrounded with her marketing—pineapples, bananas, oranges, potatoes and all sorts of vegetables, and an immense armful of orange blossoms and flowers.

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"How would New Yorkers like to go seventy-five or a hundred miles to market?" he asked, as we walked out on the pier to see the inspiring picture.

I did not have time to answer before she came bounding toward her father and at one spring landed in his arms with her bare legs about his waist and arms about his neck kissing him joyously.

"Daddy, did you think I was gone too long? We came back just as soon as we could, but it took so long to get all the things. You were not uneasy, Daddy?" she asked, kissing him several times again.

"No, Jim; when you are with Don I know you are safe, but Mr. Wood and I have an errand to do after supper and we want to get away as soon as possible. Run with Don and see what you can do quickly," he replied, returning her caresses before letting her down.

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"Right away, Daddy," she replied, scampering toward the house, Howard following her with his eyes until she disappeared, her knickerbockers and her short blouse reminding me of the boy I had thought her to be.

"Somehow I wish she were not here to know what we will be doing," he said, turning to me with a long breath, almost a sigh, fingering his short, black beard.

I turned and faced him, deciding that right now was the proper time for little Jim to realize her dreams. I wondered if they could stand the separation.

"This might be a longer job than you think, especially if we were to strike some continued bad weather on the Gulf."

"I know that," he replied thoughtfully.

"The expense ceases to be a factor—why is now not the time to begin with her education?" I asked bluntly.

He searched me for a moment as if it was an insulting proposal. I knew he felt it as a distinct shock.

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"Wood, I have never allowed myself to think of that time. I am cowardly, I suppose, and then I don't know where to send her, yet. I don't believe she would know how to behave in girl's clothes. She has always dressed as she does now and never has craved the flub-dubs and finery of other girls."

"So much more reason you should not let her go on longer in this way. It is time now for her to come into her education and the refinements of young womanhood."

"Yes, I know you are right, but have I got the courage? I hate to see her go at all, especially without a name. It's a fearful thing, Wood. And into that country that first treated me so well and then turned it to dead-sea fruit. Nothing but ashes inside, bitter, scalding ashes."

"The world, that world, has not finished with you. Perhaps it will yet pronounce you great. You have done pretty well toward retrieving yourself. Bitter thoughts projected into the world are as substantial things as poisoned arrows, dum-dum bullets or atrocities, and may eventually return to plague us. If you can still improve in that direction I predict big things for you. Do you understand me, Howard?"

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"Wood, I comprehend;—a short time ago I would not. But the difference between theory and actual practice is great. You give me an awful big order."

"I know it is, but you have already begun to fill it without coaching. Make a mighty effort—such an effort as only Howard Byng can make and the ashes of this dead-sea fruit that you have been eating in pretty good quantities, will turn into a tonic to spur you on to more wonderful things—a magnificent life. I admit it is not a small thing to let little Jim leave you now, but it strikes me it is a real test. Are you going to let the bigness of Howard Byng come to the front?"

"I know you are right," said he, walking, with head down, down along the pier toward his valuable warehouse, "maybe I just need someone like you to prod and goad it into me, to put a rowel into my selfishness and make me wake up, but—but, you see, I don't know yet where and how to send her. I have always thought of taking her myself, but there's no time for that now."

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"Are you willing to be guided by me in the matter?"

"Wood, you know I would rather take advice from you than from any other living person. And why shouldn't I? You always set me right. You started me right, but I got away from you, into a great deal of trouble. Anything you are willing to say *you know*, I will take at one hundred per cent. In fact, I would be mighty glad if you could tell me where to send her, but I don't know if I can stand it now," he added.

"I believe I do know just where to send her, and also just how to get her there safely, perhaps more so than if you went as you have planned. And I will take the time to tell you how I happened to know from personal contact. Let us go back in the boat and sit down again."

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He followed me into the cabin and sat down opposite where I could study his face.

"Howard," I began seriously, "in order to make this plain to you I must give you some inside information that has not reached the public, and perhaps it never will officially, and for that reason treat it as ultra-confidential.

"When Germany began war on Europe it has been said and known positively that it was only a question of time when we would be in it, and that no preparation was made to meet that condition. But a great deal of work was done that has not begun to show yet. It is true that public sentiment would not support raising an army and equipping it, owing to such Hun stuff as 'I Did Not Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier,' but other things perhaps as important were accomplished. One of them was to determine just how much power the Hun had in this country. The beginning was made in schools of all kinds, colleges and universities, in fact, every institution of an educational nature.

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"I put in the best part of two years analyzing teachers and professors tainted with Prussianism, whether it was imported or domestic. It was a rare experience and required careful work. Directly or indirectly, I came in contact with all of them, and in many cases visited the schools and colleges, interviewing professors and teachers under one subterfuge or another, and in doing so developed some valuable and astounding information. It will require a big basket to hold the heads that must fall from this work. If I had them sufficiently at ease and could get them to use the words Kamerad, Kultur, and Middle Europe, by their face and tone I could tell. No one can repeat those words without giving themselves away, if pro-Hun.

"Girls' schools were the hardest to get into without revealing my purpose, which was always desirable. A man knocking at their gates was a big interrogation point, but I managed to see about all of them. Girls of to-day are mothers of to-morrow, and after all it's the mothers that count, Howard.

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"I am telling you this," I went on, "expecting you to grasp the inference, in order to avoid going into details. I found a girls' school, perhaps two hours from New York, which is an ideal place for little Jim. The conditions are the best. She would be really educated, and be as safe as though at home and possibly more so, just now when she is advancing toward womanhood." I paused, watching Howard closely.

"But, Wood," he replied, with great concern, "little Jim has always been so free, wouldn't it be wrong to shut her up in a place like that? What would she do without her flowers and being able to go about as she pleased?"

"They have immense grounds, covered with a beautiful forest, in which she would be delighted. She can roam at will after school hours. Of course, students can't leave the grounds, or rather the estate, without escort. There are flowers in greatest profusion, everything to make the place attractive. It is the safest and best I found among all that I visited. In fact, I went back once or twice on a special invitation to do a small favor."

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"But, Wood, she is not ready; she has no clothes; and how can she be sent there alone?" he asked, as though frightened even at a serious discussion of the matter.

"Well"—I hesitated, a little excited myself at the prospect—"I think that can be arranged. She could be put aboard the steamer at Key West, in charge of someone. I will also have one of our men, a friend, meet the boat in New York, and see

personally that she reaches the school absolutely safe and protected every moment, better than you could do it yourself. My friend in New York will actually see her inside the gate and make it known that someone else is interested in her besides her parent and that will count for a good deal."

"You make it very plausible, and—well—let me sleep over it, and hear what she says about it in the morning," he replied, as we saw her come bounding down the pier like a rubber ball to tell us supper was ready.

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CHAPTER XXII

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We had no trouble negotiating for our wrecking boat—the *Anti-Kaiser*. The owner was all right, as could be inferred by the name of his new schooner, a good solid roomy one, as Howard said, fully equipped for deep-sea sponging and light wrecking among the spongers who lose their boats occasionally in sudden tropical storms. It did not surprise me when he told us that he expected to operate about the Bahamas when the season opened and didn't propose to take any chances. He had applied for a five-pound gun to mount aft and a one-pounder forward, and got it. However, there was no gunner and one would have to be provided.

Howard did not refer to little Jim during the evening. He was counting the cost—the effect on her life and his, the necessity of being untrammelled in the immense enterprise we were undertaking. I wanted to learn from Washington the status of the Ramund case before commencing. I went to Key West in the *Titian* and spent most of the night there. As I expected, Ramund could not be refused bail much longer, but the department would post me regarding his movements. Then I ran into Ike Barry again.

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"Still fishing, Ike?"

"Yes—the Missus couldn't stand it any longer and came down a few days ago. She is a better scout on the water than I am. We're having a great time."

I remembered having met her at Tampa with him one time and recalled her as a sweet, motherly woman who had raised a splendid daughter they spoke of a great deal.

I found Scotty there, too, still out of a job, going about like a fish out of water, his face so long he was tramping on his upper lip, waiting for his passport to go back to the British Navy.

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"Scotty, didn't you tell me you were a gunner in the Royal Navy before you went in the engine-room?"

"I certainly was. Served two enlistments, the last one as chief."

"Then you are just the man I want."

He became jubilant and came over to me stronger than ever when I told him what had happened and how he had helped by delaying the Boche cutter. After another "drap of Scotch" he said he would go to hell for me.

I told him what I wanted and warned him that it would not be a joy ride, but probably very dangerous.

"If you've got two guns, I'd swim from here to the Tortugas for a chance at 'em."

"All right, Scotty, stay here till I come for you and keep your eyes open."

When I got back to "Canby's bay" day was breaking. After breakfast I told Howard about Scotty and what I received from Washington.

"Even though Ramund and the manager are admitted to bail, what can they do down here? You have a clear case against them," he said.

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"None too strong, Howard, without little Jim. As I see it, everything depends on her testimony. Have you decided about her?"

"Yes, I have," he began, relieved when the subject was raised. "We talked all night about it. For a while she would cry bitterly and say she would never leave me here alone, then for an hour we would be planning for her to go, only for her to come back and curl herself in my lap and tearfully declare she would never leave me here alone. We both realize it's a turning point in our lives that requires courage and, Wood, do you know I believe she is the braver. Well, in the night we came to this definite conclusion—that if you will help us she will go as soon as I can get her ready. Do you realize what it means for me to part with her? It's like tearing my heart and soul out."

"Howard, I believe I do, but her safety is most important now. We may be away a week and you can't leave her here."

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"I know that, but she has been raised here on the Keys, dressed like a boy, and has never known either girls or women. Just what clothing she will need, and how to get it, is a puzzle to both of us."

That was a complication I had overlooked and hesitated a moment. I thought of Mrs. Ike Barry.

"Howard, a friend and his wife are at the hotel at Key West. I believe she would be glad to help us out and fix little Jim for the trip. Her permanent outfit and clothing it is best to leave to someone with whom I can arrange at the school."

"That sounds good, but, Wood, I am afraid that would be loading you unduly with my personal affairs."

"You will have ample opportunity to square yourself with me before we get through," I replied, laughing. "Little Jim partly belongs to me; besides, she has become an important Government witness."

During the afternoon we brought the *Anti-Kaiser* to the nearest safe anchorage. We put aboard water and provisions for a week. Then, in the afternoon, I went with Howard and little Jim to Key West to prepare her for her journey into a new world. She acted at times as though moving in a dream, first delighted then sad because she was leaving her chum, teacher, father,—and such a wonderful father.

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Mrs. Barry told me afterward it was a rare pleasure to select little Jim's outfit and clothing, to witness her perfect delight in the first possession of pretty things. Howard and I stood by as helpless as though run out of gasoline or the steering gear had gone wrong. Little Jim evidenced her femininity. Motherly Mrs. Barry delighted her. She talked of her and her new things all the way home, when the depression of parting was not on her mind.

Going to the wireless again I reported details. Little Jim was a vitally important witness for the Government and all was soon arranged. Venerable, fatherly Henry Woburn, a sort of messenger of the Department, would arrive the next day to whisk her away by rail to the gates of the school inside of which she would be safe. The school took great care of young girl pupils; an additional caution, quite unknown to her, being exercised in her case because of her importance as a Government witness.

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I shall not attempt to describe the last scenes between father and daughter and the delightful simplicity with which she bade me good-bye. I could not if I tried. Both felt it was a distinct crisis in their lives, a turn in life's road which was separating them—how long—and where would it lead? Spiritualists, soothsayers, fortune-tellers, astrologers, who pretend to look even one minute into the future, are lying mountebanks. They would usurp infinity. I do know that Howard Byng's life, so far, had been stormy, one of great activity, but who could say not useful. No one can fail to admire intense action, and his intentions were good. His life so far was a wonder to me, and I had faith that such tremendous energy would be utilized for the general good. Little Jim, half of his blood, primitive, fierce when aroused, but pure and real red, the other half from the purposeful, refined, delicate but no less iron-willed Norma Byng likely could not escape the responsibility of its possession. Action, vital action, would be expected. As now constituted she had the simplicity of extreme childhood, and the knowledge and power of execution of a man, making a combination that might be difficult to balance. Little Jim, now a real girl for the first time, looked splendid; little Jim, crack rifle shot and unerring with the pistol; little Jim, champion swimmer and diver of the Gulf; little Jim, who ran a big motor boat forty miles an hour alone, who dynamited the Huns' boat, made their capture possible, and saved her father's life, was gone, it seemed to me, forever.

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CHAPTER XXIII

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Soon the Pullman car carrying little Jim, my star witness, was out of sight, actually in the protecting arms of Uncle Sam, in the person of Father Woburn. After getting Scotty we made for home—I mean Canby's—as fast as the *Sprite* would carry us. Howard was very thoughtful but not depressed. He locked the store and put up a notice. We took Don along to cook, as we didn't want an unknown quantity in any form with us on a mission of such tremendous importance.

The next morning we anchored the *Anti-Kaiser* over the spot where the sunken U-boat lay. We brought the little *Titian* along with which we could run errands. Scotty's work consisted of standing watch and looking out for all kinds of danger, to use the deck guns, and take no chances.

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It was slow work getting started, though the weather favored us. Howard was timid about the diving suit first, but finally grew confident, and the fourth day without an interruption we had all the drowned crew in the forward hold, and about everything else loose of any value in the captain's, officers' and crew's quarters, which, as I explained, were separated by a water-tight bulkhead from the cargo-hold forward.

It was a very unpleasant, gruesome job. There were twenty-four, instead of a crew of ten or twelve, of the sunken cargo sub, the name of which must remain covered until the Government sees fit to divulge it. All had to be moved from a boat in sixty feet of open roadstead water, searched and photographed individually and in group, in both cases showing as much of the faces as their condition would permit. Arduous, nauseating work and we were glad that it was over. I thought it would get on Howard's nerves, but they seemed of iron again.

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Don had gone with the *Titian* to get mail and telegrams for me, and possibly hear from little Jim. We had eaten in the evening and were smoking forward. Scotty patrolled as lookout as though serving on a dreadnaught. Howard was quiet and thoughtful. I thought it was because he was tired and depressed after ransacking a wreck for dead Huns and having to fight swarms of sharks. I was congratulating myself on getting a lot of supplementary proof of much importance, especially the records of the ship and the loading and sailing orders of the captain.

"Wood," he began quietly. "How much is that vessel worth; that is, what would it cost built now?"

"I don't know, Howard; what would you guess her dead-weight tonnage?"

"The last time I was down I went all around her. She is over three hundred feet long and twenty-five or thirty-foot beam, amidships, tapering a little toward each end."

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"Perhaps five thousand tons?"

"I would guess her that big anyway."

"A submarine that size cannot be built at the present time for less than a million dollars; two hundred dollars a dead-weight ton, I think, is the ruling price now."

"The Government wants submarines now, don't it?"

"The Government wants all kinds of ships, anything that can carry a ton of freight, Howard," I replied, looking at him sharply, but he did not answer for some minutes.

"Supposing by any chance she could be floated, where would we stand?"

"I am not even an amateur authority on Admiralty laws. Practically, you would have a first-class, 'made-in-Germany' submarine to sell the Government after you had removed the cargo. Howard, do you—do you think there is a chance?" I asked, intensely interested.

"I don't know. So far as I can see the hull, the outside shell is intact. It may be in the rivet joints aft. I do know that there was no water in her freight hold, the inrush nearly killing me when I finally got it open. With the water out of there and her submerging tanks, she might rise."

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"You think you are right; the freight hold is the biggest part?"

"At least two-thirds and if her submerging tanks are pumped out she is bound to come up, the long, dangerous work of raising the cargo through the water is unnecessary and the sharks are pretty thick," he said, looking out toward the barren Tortugas, dotting the evening horizon southward. "And—and we would be rich, our fortunes would be made."

"Howard, why do you use the plural?"

"Because this time you have got to take it. This is to be a fifty-fifty deal. You are not going to get away from me again. You told me how to get turpentine and rosin from stumps and then walked away, leaving me to feel like an ingrate for not making you take half. No, sir, you will never have another chance to serve me that way. Half is yours this time. You've got to take it."

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"Howard, I understand the spirit that moves you. I am glad your big, generous heart is working again normally, but there are two good reasons why you must count me out. First, by reason of my employment, it is forbidden, absolutely forbidden, and again, I have no interest either by discovery or recovery. Keep it—keep it for—little Jim. She did it all when she swam under water and hung a 'terror' to the Hun's bow."

"I can recall that I accepted such a plea twice and felt like a dog for doing so. I tell you, you are not going to get away from me this time. There will be plenty, but, if there wasn't—"

"Don't bother about that now, Howard," I interrupted, "plenty of time to count the chickens after they are hatched. I can see Don coming. Four days is a long time to be

out of the world," I said, glad to change the subject. I was elated that there was a prospect of floating the U-boat that told such a vital story. What more glory did I need than to have been even indirectly responsible?

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CHAPTER XXIV

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Don had an armful of dailies for me that had accumulated and a single wireless, which was laconic enough—

"Come to wireless station."

It's frequently the short order that gives one a long jump, it being an all-night job to the station and back. Howard had received a letter from little Jim. He was pleased but puzzled, laboring with its translation. Little Jim had received her total education from him so far and had had little practice in letter writing.

"She arrived there all right," he volunteered, continuing to read.

"She had a reliable escort. Father Woburn is just as sure as he is mild and gentlemanly," I ventured, absorbing his delight.

"I think she does fine for one who has never tried to write, but she is a little hard to make out. Read it to me, perhaps you can better understand just what she means," said he, handing me a letter of several pages as we sat on the deck facing the setting sun, with our feet on the rail. I first glanced over it, then began to read:

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"DEAR DADDY:

"We got here all right or I would not be able to write. At first I was scared but Mr. Woburn was so nice that I soon began to like it, I mean the cars and the towns we went through. In the evening we got to Jacksonville and then after eating supper I had to go to bed. It seemed so funny to sleep in that little place while the train runs so fast. My new clothes were so much bother, I wished I had my regular clothes—they are so much quicker—but I suppose it will be a long time before I get them again.

"The next morning we were at Richmond—Mr. Woburn told me these names—then Washington, so much more beautiful than anything you ever told me about, then Baltimore and Philadelphia. We did not go to New York, but I am going there to-morrow with one of my teachers to get the clothes and things I need for school. It does not begin for two weeks, and I and another girl are the only ones here now ahead of time. It is in a great big woods, a beautiful place. Mr. Woburn came clear up here with me and talked with the principal. He said that because I knew Mr. Wood we would get along fine, but I must never go out alone. A teacher who I like and plays music I can listen to all day will go with me. She says I can write to you every day and I will. Tell Mr. Wood if he is there yet that I love him almost as much as I do you, Daddy. I hope you don't miss me as I do you. Tell Don his cooking is the best, but maybe I will get used to the kind we have here. I must go to bed now. My room is a great, big long one and my teacher uses the other end of it, and tells me everything I want to know. She knows so much about everything.

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"She says that nobody knows what our first name is here but the registrar, and you must get used to me signing my name,

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"MISS CANBY,
"With lots of love."

When I stopped reading Howard laughed outright, arose and rubbed his hands, then slapped me on the back.

"That sounds to me just as though little Jim were talking. Now I feel sure and am satisfied. I can fight wild cats, a buzz-saw, or all the Huns." Then, sobering some, he sauntered down the deck and returned to where I sat, still holding little Jim's letter, said soberly, "Wood, again I am indebted to you. I don't believe I could ever have accomplished it, so well and quickly. Somehow, now that she is away and in safe hands, I am greatly relieved."

"You give me undue credit. I am glad little Jim is safe, but a double purpose robs me of credit. The way things now stand we could not prove our case without little Jim's testimony. My unsupported evidence would be strained to prove the Hun boat fired through your boat while you were diving. For that reason they may be interested in getting her out of the way. That's why Father Woburn was sent. Even if they do learn where she is they have a better chance at heaven—and you know that is nil—than to get her now."

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"I don't care how many purposes you have," replied Byng. "I know that your main one

is patriotic or humanitarian. I have benefited so often, I know. I would indeed be selfish if not willing to render service in return. With little Jim safe, you can use my body, my life for any purpose."

"Well, it may come to that. We all must take big chances; in a way, literally play tag with death. The best elements of the world must prevail. A hundred and fifty years ago a great man predicted that the hope of the world lay in the western hemisphere. We are face to face now with fulfilling the Will of God and the wonderful prophecy which anyone can understand now. Our men and millions are being used to restore national conscience, simple normal regard for contracts and women. The flat poison head of morganatic marriages and degeneracy must go under the heel of justice. You and I will win here. You will then be rich in money. And when it is over I may make another request that will stretch our friendship."

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"Wood, it can't be done. I can't conceive of you asking a favor I would not grant. It isn't in you."

"Howard, you overestimate me. I do believe mistakes normal and believe in everyone alike whose intentions are good. You and I have had three or four days of unpleasant work and we are now on a floating morgue filled by your resourcefulness and boldness. It takes daring courage, and disregard of life to go down among the sharks to get dead Huns. Before we get away from here greater valor will be required, for our purpose is indeed ambitious; but I don't believe you can possibly exhibit more greatness than you did that night on Alligator Island a long time ago—our first real adventure."

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Howard stopped in his tracks as though transfixed, staring at me as though suddenly passing into delirium. Undaunted, I went ahead.

"Howard, I believed in that little girl you carried out that morning in your arms, then no bigger or older than little Jim, and I believe in her yet. I believe at that time she began to trust you, and I believe she still trusts you."

He stood still near me, his face twitched and again there gathered in his eyes that fierceness of the Georgia Cracker when enraged, his hands seemed in readiness to tear me to pieces. I arose and faced him. Notwithstanding his powerful physique, I towered above, determined to break silence on that subject again, feeling he would be better for it.

It was a silent battle of man against man, where neither flinched. It took time, but finally he hung his head and moved slowly away. Turning toward me, he said in a voice so hollow and strained it might have come from the grave, "Wood—you—you don't seem to know I—I saw—I—I heard. There is no mistake—" Then with a slight trace of a plea, he added, "I know."

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"Howard, no man ever lived in whom I believe more sincerely. On the other hand, by virtue of my occupation, I have to know. My superiors are not much impressed with 'will-o'-the-wisps' or 'matters *ignis fatuus*.' I must rationally and sanely know things and I feel so strong on this matter that I request, almost demand that you, after we are through here, make some effort to find her in order to confirm what you so sincerely believe true. Fifteen years often changes us. I think it has changed you. You owe it to yourself—and little Jim. It will not be so difficult, for Ramund is obtainable now."

"It is unnecessary, Wood—I know I am right. But I am—I was glad when you told me you thought she was a—good woman now. I hate to think of little Jim's mother being bad," he added so faintly I could hardly hear. It was a great struggle. Such a man as Fighting Byng bends slowly, but how wonderful that they bend at all. I thought it best to drop the subject for the present.

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"Howard, I must go to the wireless station to get in touch with Washington. It will likely take all night. Do you feel safe here without me?"

"I don't see why not. The little Scotch gunner and I can change watches during the night. Did you get any news?"

"Being called to the wireless is significant of something new."

"What's the war news?" struggling to recover himself.

"The general situation appears dark just now."

"How is that—just what do you mean?" he inquired anxiously.

"To make it short, the Hun has Europe whipped to a standstill, with Russia delivered to the enemy by a Judas Iscariot. The Boche does not believe we will ever take the place of the Russian Army. He doesn't think we can or will really fight, and, of course, is making his last colossal mistake. But just now his chest is away out. He is bold and impudent and a little more irrational than usual. For that reason I would not be surprised to see some such thing reflected in these parts unless we are unusually

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lucky. I feel like advising extreme caution—but I will know more when I get back from the wireless station," I added, watching Howard closely.

"Wood—I can only repeat what I have said—now I believe little Jim is safe from harm, besides I have placed her beyond want. I will fight with you as long as there's an ounce of Georgia blood left in me."

CHAPTER XXV

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When I got in touch with Washington I was told that the matter I had in hand became unexpectedly, stupendously important, in fact, so vital I was urged to use the utmost care, but to rush as fast as possible. The importance of the Canby girl as a witness was realized and she was guarded every moment by one of unquestioned loyalty and discretion, and plenty of khaki that seemed accidental.

This pleased me immensely, for more than one reason. But the other information was not so reassuring. Ramund and the manager had been admitted to bail in the sum of a hundred thousand dollars each. Rash and risky conduct could be looked for on the part of the Boches and I must not underestimate their resourcefulness. Though yet unpublished, it was known that Bernstorff had deflorated and daily ravished diplomatic virginity in a most brutal and conscienceless manner so truly Hun.

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I informed them a private party had hold of the wreck, that through him I had in my possession twenty-four bodies, together with a mass of evidence and asked for some kind of an armed vessel to protect Howard's ambitious efforts to float and bring in intact. They said they would do the best they could, every available vessel having been sent to fight submarines.

I returned to the wrecking operations at the Tortugas doubtful of immediate protection.

Howard was on watch and very glad to see me, and delighted that the Government, too, was watching little Jim.

"Have you been up all night?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes."

"I'll have Don get breakfast; then you sleep. We will get everything ready. I want to go down to make one more careful examination of the wreck in order to finally decide on a plan of action, but I believe I have figured it out during the night."

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"Breakfast, yes. Sleep I can do without until to-night." I did not tell him about the necessity of haste.

After breakfast he went down and remained two hours. He had scarcely discarded his diving suit before I saw he was jubilant.

"Wood,—I believe now it's only a case of making pump connections to the freight hold and get the water out of there first. I still believe, if we pump out the submerging tanks after that, she has got to come to the top even if the engine-room and crew's quarters aft are injured," he said enthusiastically.

"How do you know the submerging tanks are intact and water tight?"

"Can't find a trace of anything wrong I cannot fix with little trouble."

I knew it was not an amateur talking. He had been able to do anything with machinery of a hydraulic nature, his paper-mill experience being largely along that line. Besides, he had spent the last fifteen years in and about the water with practical knowledge of marine machinery and pumps.

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He rested a short while and went down, this time with tools he thought he needed, and in another two hours the full engine force of the *Anti-Kaiser* was drawing the water out of the freight hold. Howard descended repeatedly to see that it continued to work properly.

Scotty stood watch continuously during the day, scanning every sail or smoke that came within range of his glasses. We all prayed for good weather. A storm such as they have in the Gulf occasionally would be very bad, but that was a risk we had to take.

Howard induced a big sponger, a friend of his, to bring supplies of all sorts. After twenty-four hours of steady pumping the hold was cleared. Howard said the wreck had righted itself slightly.

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During this time Don and I disposed of the Hun bodies a long way from the scene of

our operations, for obvious reasons.

Then came the more delicate work of pumping out the submerging tanks of the wreck. If this could not be done our work would fail, but Howard was confident and labored almost like a superman. He said he was now as familiar with the engine-room of the sunken sub as the man who made it, and was certain. It took six hours to get satisfactory connections and again the pumps were started.

After pumping three hours on the submerging tanks, Howard dived again, tremendously anxious. He remained below some time before coming up, clearly disappointed. The pumping so far had failed to show the slightest results.

"It's got to come, Wood; it's got to come; but, damn it, it don't come," he fumed, speeding up the pumps to the last ounce of the *Anti-Kaiser's* powerful engines.

"Hit it for three hours more, then you can tell better. We may expect results too soon," seeing the canker of doubt at work. He realized fully what a failure meant, stupendous service to his country, his fortune and the opportunity to resume the name of Howard Byng, and place little Jim right before the world, all hung in the balance. Who could have stood such a strain and retained power of judgment or even sanity.

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I watched him closely the next three hours. The pangs of hell could have gripped no man harder. He stood by the pumps and engines compelling by sheer force of will the last atom of effort in the combination of steel, brass and fuel.

Then he donned the diving suit somewhat as a man going to his execution, but hoping for a reprieve at the last moment, though with magnificent will he continued to lash the straining pumps, and they seemed to actually speed up under the fierce compelling gaze, as he went over the side to go down to pronounce his own doom.

He had been on the bottom but a short time when he signaled to "haul up." I will agree while we were doing so were anxious moments; we were not to remain in doubt long. Even before he could get his suit off he waved his arms, and I knew he was again Howard Byng, resourceful, successful, exultant.

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He almost tore off the diving suit after I unfastened it. Scotty and Don sensed excitement and all crowded about him.

"She's coming—she's coming," he shouted; "her bow is now three feet from the bottom and her stern is almost clear. She's ours! She's ours! She must have a heavier line fastened to her bow or the tide will carry her away enough to break our pump connections," he added breathlessly. "She is ours, boys; the Hun is ours! The world is ours!" he again shouted, the strain ending in delirious joy. Then, running to the bow of the *Anti-Kaiser*, he grabbed the end of a two-inch hawser, scorned the diving suit, and went over the side like a porpoise or a sea-lion into its natural element.

I paid out the line to him. In a moment more he had made it fast to the bow of the Boche sub, and was coming rapidly up the line hand over hand, like an orang-outang.

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CHAPTER XXVI

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All that night the pumps driven by the engines of the *Anti-Kaiser* worked with unerring certainty, and appeared to feel the important work; every exhaust, powerful and distinct, pronouncing a new life, a new ambition, a wonderful achievement for Fighting Howard Byng.

After daylight we could visualize results. Below we could easily distinguish what seemed a rather nebulous, long, dark shadow in the sea. Howard went down and found that the U-boat was raising at the rate of a foot per hour, and a total of sixty hours would be required before it would reach the surface.

Now new troubles threatened. The weather that had so graciously favored us for almost a week looked ominous. Howard, who knew all about Gulf weather, scanned the sky and shook his head.

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"I believe we are in for it. But the way we're anchored now our bow is all right. It's going to come from out there," he said, pointing toward the northwest.

Another anchor was carried out and every precaution taken while the pumps still chugged with perfect rhythm, and gloriously labored toward the goal for which we prayed. The U-boat now hung in suspension in the clear Gulf water, and was slowly but surely raising to our will, but should the hose connection break, having no check valve, it would immediately fill and sink. Everyone was alert and strained for the emergency. Additional hawsers lashed it fore and aft to the *Anti-Kaiser* to guard against being shifted by submarine currents that mysteriously form during storms.

It finally came, a veritable hurricane, lasting, fortunately, only about five hours. Wind sixty miles per hour brought solid sheets of water, twisting and undulating as if to wreak vengeance and try our hearts.

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During the storm Howard moved about constantly, solemn and determined, examining every detail, forcing the pumps to unflinching performance by sheer power of his adamant will though the storm raged.

I do actually believe machinery, commonly thought to be inanimate, answers to a strong will, literally driven to good behavior and specific performance by the silent, fierce, compelling determination and psychic force of the man in control. Locomotives are especially so sensitive, proven by thousands of authentic instances.

Scotty, like the perfectly trained naval mariner, also defied the storm and for no moment ceased his patrol on the deck, peering for dangers approaching through the angry whirling sheets.

The sea calmed, as did our nervous strain, without a mishap, and the work of the pumps went merrily on, at no time halting a part of a second, as if defying the elements to defeat them in their patriotic and useful purpose.

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Near sundown Howard wanted to descend and examine the wreck at close range. I began on the hand air-pump again which had to move with the precision and regularity of respiration. It would become tiresome if one did not know that such rhythm were necessary to a human life below. In this case I believed a most wonderful life.

He stayed down a long time, but when he came up he was more exultant and jubilant than ever before.

"Wood, in the better light I have been examining her hull for breaks, both inside and outside, and for the life of me I can find nothing wrong. I believe the bombs simply put their air or water pumps out of commission. That's why they were trapped down there. She is raising now on an almost even keel. She is ours, Wood; she is ours, and she will float as good as ever when the water is all out!" he urged with the vehemence of a man who was told he could live and return to a congenial sphere into the great world of usefulness with his name again. A name and fortune for little Jim, whom he loved so consumingly and singly that she was a part of him—his blood, his child, his chum and companion.

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His enthusiasm was contagious; I got it. Besides, I exulted on my own account. To bring such tangible evidence into a court of law and the world's tribunal of such stupendous importance raised my operations to a magnitude unequaled, and must without effort attract attention of "The All Highest." I had developed from two warrants for minor offenses a matter in which the whole world was intensely interested. With these ruminations came the thought of safety. We had the Hun boat. We could see it. Another day and its conning tower would be out, and another ought to enable us to tow her away. And we were insufficiently protected.

"Howard, we must not depend on the protection of the guns on this boat. Too much is at stake. We should have a patrol that will prevent any boat or vessel coming within at least three miles. The *Titian* is too small. Your *Sprite* would be the thing. She is big enough to mount the five-pound gun to enforce such a limit to all vessels."

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"How are we going to get her; she is anchored in the bay at home."

"Can the old darkey, Don, run the *Sprite*, do you think?"

"Yes, almost as well as I can."

"I have been out of touch with Washington now for nearly forty-eight hours, and should go to Key West to get a line on what is happening. Suppose I take him in the little *Titian*, call at Canby's, leave him to bring the *Sprite*, and go on to Key West. I ought to be back here in three or four hours."

"Fine, but put the juice to the *Titian*; she can fly if you give her the gas. You're right: we ought to have the *Sprite* to patrol and also ought to know what the Boche is up to outside, if anything," he agreed quickly.

During the night the pumps worked unceasingly with a punch and force, imparted by Howard's care and vigilance. As the last word in Boche submarine ships came nearer the surface, he seemed to actually scorn either sleep or rest and took his food while walking about vigilantly. He realized it was a supreme moment. Energies he had stored by a comparatively quiet existence for years he used unstintingly.

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Before daylight the next morning I took Don in the *Titian* to Canby's, saw him on his way from there with the *Sprite*, then rushed to Key West and established communication at once with the powers that be.

I was told that every branch of the Government was intensely interested in the development which bade fair to uncover craven, cringing Mexico and many

traitorous, treasonable concerns protected by citizenship, and was enjoined to great care and secrecy.

Then I asked to have at least two marines detached from the special guard service in Key West for my use as I was short of man power on which I could depend.

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For this they gave the necessary order. They wirelessly me that Ramund and three others, upon being released on bail, had, after a day or two, taken an evident underground rail route to Mexico. The Government agents were out of touch with Washington, owing to difficulties furnished by Mexican conditions. The Boches were forfeiting their bail, or up to deviltry, or both.

This bit of information did not please me, for I saw disturbing possibilities. I picked up the daily papers, mail and the two marines, and hurried back to the Tortugas, which I reached about noon time by forcing the *Titian* to her limit.

The marines were lusty fellows, full of ginger. Yes, they both had had target gun practice. I was glad of that.

The five-pound gun was quickly transferred to the deck of Howard's *Sprite*. We put Scotty, who, of course, was an expert with motor-driven boats, and one of the marines aboard her with instructions to encircle constantly our operations, at a three-mile limit, to use the gun to prevent vessels of any character approaching us. The other marine was put in Scotty's place on the *Anti-Kaiser* and I felt pretty safe. So did Howard.

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Wonderful progress was made while I was away. The conning tower was all out and the oval back of the submarine was awash. Howard was haggard, but walking on air. He had calculated that before night the submerging tanks would be empty, then we could transfer the pumps to the engine-room and crew's quarters aft. It wouldn't take long to make her fit for towing.

About dusk Scotty came in for food, and said he would be willing to stay out on the *Sprite* patrolling until midnight, and then, if relieved for four hours, would resume.

Just before dark Howard did transfer the pump to the after hold, the engine-room and crew's quarters and it began throwing a merry stream, every throb bringing us nearer the end of our task and goal.

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I tried to get Howard to sleep some, but he only laughed.

"When we are through I will have months to sleep."

I did not tell him what a filthy condition existed in Mexico, and how long it would be before we would be compelled to put the cleaner on her. She was pro-Hun to the core and somehow I did not like the fact that Ramund was there now and only a day or two sail from us.

Darkness had set in with a cloudy sky. Everything went well until about time for Scotty to report at midnight when the marine on guard saw something over the port bow; it looked like a vessel coming, without lights.

"What do you think it is?" Howard asked anxiously.

"I can't make out but it's something and it's getting plainer. I wonder where Scotty is with the *Sprite*?" The marine stood at attention by the side of the one-pounder in the bow. The submarine was riding easy just clear of the *Anti-Kaiser's* sides.

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We finally recognized the outlines of a vessel advancing, and apparently a big one, too. It was not moving fast but was surely approaching, bearing directly down on us. Our port and starboard lights were surely visible to them and they could certainly see them in time to clear us.

"What can we do but fire on her? She will be on top of us in another minute!" shouted Howard, fully alive to the danger.

I called to the marine to let a shot go directly at her, which he did instantly, then another and another, but the little one-pound shots apparently made as much impression on her iron bow as water on a duck's back, and she did not veer a fraction of a point, coming dead on us. When she got closer I could make out she was undoubtedly a big merchantman, perhaps eight or ten thousand tons. How I prayed for Scotty to be here and give her a dose of a five-pound gun. But seconds counted now, our danger was extreme, and we were wholly helpless. On she came, moving perhaps at the rate of twelve knots. She could not possibly keep such a course by mistake for the one-pound gun made enough noise in the silent midnight Gulf to awaken the dead.

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Howard was not excited. He made a step toward the marine waiting for another order to fire, then stopped and seemed to measure our chances. He appeared to be taking inventory of the damage the great blunt bow would do during the few seconds before she struck the *Anti-Kaiser* wrecking boat a glancing blow forward that

brought her over on her beam's end, snapping the hawsers that fastened us to the submarine, as through cotton strings or cobwebs.

Howard and the marine grasped the one-pounder to keep from sliding down the now vertical decks of the *Anti-Kaiser* into the sea, I being just as fortunate in getting my arm through a hawser eye.

Her dull black iron sides seemed an age getting out of the way, leaving the *Anti-Kaiser* trembling and rocking like a chip on the white caps.

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Both Howard and I rushed to the side to ascertain if possible what was undoubtedly a deliberate attempt to run us down, murder us and steal the prize we had labored so long and arduously to raise from the floor of the sea.

Where was Scotty with the *Sprite* and five-pound gun? Had he turned traitor and played into their hands?

CHAPTER XXVII

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We did not have long to wait to learn where Scotty was. The murderous, devil ship had just disappeared into the night when in the silent midnight waters of the Gulf an ear-splitting report of a cannon came like a shout from heaven. I was sure now Scotty would follow all night to get them, sink them or get sunk. Howard and I turned our attention to actual damages. The lanterns by which we worked had all slid into the sea. By the wonderful phosphorescent effect of agitated Gulf waters we could see that the submarine still rolled violently and was taking water in the after-hold out of which we had been pumping for six hours. Of course, with hawsers parted, it began to drift away from us in the tide, accelerated by the tail wake of the big ship.

We heard two more shots from the five-pounder and my confidence in Scotty and the marine aboard the *Sprite* increased. I knew the little Scot was working to do his bit.

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Both Howard and I turned together to the little *Titian* tied with liberal swinging room to the stern of the *Anti-Kaiser*. We pulled her alongside and Howard jumped in. "She is half full of water!" he shouted. "She had keeled over on her beam as the colliding ship shoved her out of the way!"

The loosened submarine had drifted out of sight. Howard finally found a lantern and lit it. We went to the lifeboat of the *Anti-Kaiser*, so securely lashed it would take minutes to free it, and the minutes now were more than hours at another time, and Howard knew it.

As though pre-arranged he plunged into the sea in the direction of the drifting prize, his life, his hope, his patriotic endeavor, his duty to little Jim, all in the balance.

I felt safer now as I knew he would get to her quicker that way even if she went to the bottom. Fifteen years of sponging had made water almost a natural element to him.

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The *Anti-Kaiser's* three anchors were let out during the storm and had evidently held. After a rapid examination no damage was evidenced; she did not leak.

With the lantern I rushed into the hold. I must have kicked the old darkey Don pretty hard; he had disgustingly slept through it all. I then relit the red and green signal light the collision had put out. I stopped to listen, but the only sound was the faint lapping of the water against the sides of the *Anti-Kaiser*.

Straining my eyes to get some sign of the prize, I was haunted by the thought that Howard might not find it and perish. Don came up; I ordered him to help the marine man the lifeboat, and rushed to the boat's charts to make sure which way the tidal currents ran there and estimate in what direction the submarine would drift.

As a naked steel thrust, came the knowledge that it flowed about three miles per hour through a channel between coral islands less than three miles away, not navigable because of coral formation close to the surface, the tide that had been ebbing three hours making it still more dangerous.

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I stood on the stern of the *Anti-Kaiser* and halloed, again and again, loud enough, it seemed, to reach the infernal regions. But no response came forth from the silent Gulf waters. Howard was lost or had drifted out of my voice's range.

I ordered the marine and Don to bail out the little *Titian* and see if he could start its motor. I then jumped into the lowered lifeboat, determined to find Howard. Scotty, I was sure, would take care of himself and the hell-bound ship that would run us down with murderous, destructive intent.

I would row, then get up and shout for Howard to answer, more rowing and yelling again at the top of my voice, without receiving a sound in response.

I came back to the *Anti-Kaiser* hoping Don and the marine had the *Titian* bailed out and the motor started; with that I could make more speed.

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They had the water out, but, being flooded so long, the motor would not start. Again I went out to row, this time in a larger circle, shouting at regular intervals. I recalled that I had done the same thing for Howard twenty years ago on Alligator Island in Georgia. Obsessed by the anxiety and strain the past day's hellish influence suggested and haunted me with the thought that this time he was lost, the prize lost, and little Jim fatherless! I tell you it was torture any man would escape if he could. I recalled waiting for the break of day as I did on Alligator Island, and prayed that things would turn out the way they did that time. In this instance it was different, however. The prize submarine may have been injured and sunk so far away that Howard was unable to swim back.

Before dawn, after long and hard work, I cleared the *Titian's* motor of water and had her running. I knew then I could swiftly search in daylight, and when the first rays were showing in the horizon Don made coffee.

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As I ate and drank I walked about scanning the water as far as the slowly advancing light would allow, with no results. At first a light fog obscured the coral islands, the direction in which I knew he must drift. The marine and I cursed it. But I stopped suddenly as I heard old Don in the cabin praying earnestly for the safety of his master. The sincere supplication moved and comforted.

He was right. It was no time to curse. He put plenty of food and water in the *Titian* before I started and looked to see if the rifle in the holster before me was all right, little Jim's rifle that always went with the *Titian*; then said as I was leaving that he would continue to pray for little Jim's father and me until we both returned, and, say what you will, it gave me a quiet strength.

"I know you gwine to find him," he called to me as the little propeller began to lash the water viciously as if it, too, knew what was at stake and gathered express speed like a greyhound with its quarry in sight.

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It wasn't yet broad daylight and patches of fog hung in places, which I recall annoyed me to irritation, as the *Titian* shot out in the direction I thought the prize would drift. I had gone perhaps three miles before I saw a dark spot that I first thought was a denser fog, but as I drew near it I could discern the high stern of a merchant vessel. Yes, it was a vessel, and the *Titian* seemed to know and tightened its grip on the water until I came close enough to read on its stern, *Monserat* of Vera Cruz. I could recall an old English-built vessel by that name that sailed under the Mexican flag between Mexico and California ports, and bore a doubtful reputation with the custom-house officials on the Pacific Coast. As this flashed through my mind I changed my course to avoid coming too close. I saw she was at anchor, the same dirty black sides that seemed to rush by in their evident intent to run us down. She needed paint and was so old that she had been built of iron, before steel began to be used in ship construction.

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Scotty wanted to explain why he didn't see her coming and head her off before she struck, and how he forced her to anchor by two shots into her upper works. As soon as he stopped I came alongside with him giving a broadside view of the *Monserat*.

"Have you seen anything of the submarine? This fellow cut us apart and it has been drifting."

"No—been sailing close around this fellow all night, so that he didn't play any more tricks until you go aboard," he replied, looking very haggard and hungry from his all-night patrol, eating the food I gave him ravenously.

"You did right, Scotty. Hold him at anchor until I return. I've got to locate the submarine first for she may be still floating into some dangerous position."

"I think this fellow has a gun aft, and may try something after it gets full daylight," said Scotty, viewing her with his glasses, and then, like any good sailor, swept the sea on each side and beyond.

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"Circle him at a safe distance and if he tries any tricks give him the iron—sink the ship rather than allow him to get away," I ordered, quickly preparing to resume my search in an improved light, much hastened by Scotty's work.

Scotty did not reply, but continued with his binoculars to the left of the *Monserat*.

"What is it, Scotty?"

"The light is still bad, but unless the fog fools me I can make out something to the left of the Mexican. No—no; it's nothing——" he said, disappointedly and slow. "Yes, it is—surely it is something; look yourself!" he said excitedly, handing me the glasses.

Eagerly I raised them but at first could see nothing until I changed the adjustment on the lens, but it was so dim and nebulous I was afraid Scotty's imagination was working. However, I decided to wait a few minutes for the light to improve and then take in the surroundings. The *Monserat* had been halted and was at anchor about a half a mile from one of the barren coral groups of the Tortugas. If what Scotty saw was the prize it had not drifted in the direction indicated by the charts. But if it was by chance the submarine and if the Mexican's intent on us last night was deliberate he might attempt some more tricks as soon as he saw it. I scanned the Mexican *Monserat*. Yes, there was surely a gun of some size in the stern, covered with a dirty sail cloth.

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When I looked again in the direction Scotty thought he saw something I was convinced it was not imagination, and decided to go to it at once.

"Scotty, I believe I can make out something over there, too; but it may be only a coral reef sticking out; you know these waters are full of them. Take a position well off the *Monserat's* bow and keep moving pretty fast back and forth so that he cannot reach you with his stern gun without weighing anchor. Give him the five-pound steel anywhere if he attempts to move, but keep out of his way, for that gun has you outclassed, and if he makes a hit you'll have breakfast with Davy Jones."

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Scotty set his teeth hard and began to obey my instructions. "He's welcome to all he gets from me. All I wanted was an order from you."

"Be careful though, Scotty. So far we have no charge against her. All that happened last night could have been accidental, and that's the devil of it," I called to him as I gave the *Titian* her wings and started for the dim object three or four miles beyond.

Yes, it was Howard; he had managed, after tremendous effort, to let out the anchor of the prize and stood waiting for me, his long hair and beard reminding me of a sea-lion as he stood in the tower in water up to his knees. His eyes were bloodshot and he looked all the strain of his night's effort and days of sleepless endurance.

"I knew you would come at daylight," he said quietly as I came alongside.

"I tried to find you during the night, but was not successful."

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"I thought so. It took me so long to swim to her that after getting aboard I guess I was unconscious for a time, but upon waking I finally got her hook out. I don't believe they have used the anchor since it was built," he said, after a long pull at the water I gave him.

As he ate almost savagely of the food, I told him what happened after he left, and if he was safe I must go and examine the Mexican and let him go if nothing irregular were found, as we had no right to hold him longer.

"Wood, that was not an accident."

"No, but knowing and proving is different. The flag is neutral on the surface and this farce must be suffered for a time."

"Well, you know best, but that fellow had murder in his heart, whoever he is. My anchor holds fine and plenty of water, perfectly safe unless it storms. We can pump her out here as well as anywhere," he added, somewhat softened, but yet terribly determined. What manner of man was this who could stand such punishment and exposure?

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I could not hold the Mexican, though I was sure she carried Ramund and party. I never told Howard this until long after. They had picked her up at Vera Cruz for the deliberate purpose of running down and destroying us. The principal thing I wanted then was for her to proceed to the Nicaraguan port for which she was cleared and had Scotty trail her far past Key West to see that no one was set ashore here.

We pumped out the prize successfully. The *Anti-Kaiser* was able to tow her and I succeeded in getting a sub chaser to convoy it to a Northern port. I did not see Howard again until the case was about to be called for trial some months later.

CHAPTER XXVIII

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History has been made so rapidly that those in the midst of it will not realize its speed for many years.

Unmasking the ambitious operations of Bulow and Company in the South led to swift investigation of other suspicious concerns. Every one had a well-worn path to the Transatlantic Banking Company. A monster serpent had boldly come out of the sea and coiled itself up in Wall Street, emitting foul, stuporous fumes as well as distilled

poison through financial channels. The fatally faulty psychology of the Hun and cohorts misled him as usual.

One morning the country was electrified by the announcement that the Transatlantic Banking Company was taken over as alien enemy property, and a little swift work on their books revealed hundreds of millions more property, mostly manufacturing. The serpent lacked brains as usual.

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Frequent announcements were made that sales of such property would take place either by auction or private arrangement, every time scotching a snake. The department wanted to convict Ramund, who was a director in the Transatlantic Banking Company, and it was my work to procure every bit of evidence bearing on his case, especially as it established that in Mexico Germans traded in everything from twelve-year-old virgins to highest executives.

I was taking some memoranda in the office of the custodian of alien enemy property and paying little attention to the auctioneer, who was selling widely scattered properties to a big crowd of buyers outside the rail.

However, I was instantly at attention when I heard the name Byng & Potter, Incorporated. The whole history of how the bank had deliberately robbed Howard Byng of his life's work, offered the apple to his wife and wrecked his home, instantly flashed through my mind.

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The first bid was two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, but in less than ten seconds the auctioneer was calling five hundred thousand. There was no more excitement than if he was auctioning a Bowery suit of clothes or fake jewelry.

A clerk who was working near me, well back from the rail, said it was a little connecting railroad that sent it up so high, as the other property was about nil in value. I kept on working where I sat but listened.

"Why is a jerkwater railroad exciting the bidders?" I asked the clerk.

"Well, it's leased and incorporated now into a big system."

"U-m!" I could understand now why the bidding had gradually crawled up to nine hundred thousand, where it hung again, when a bid of nine hundred and twenty-five was made, to be promptly raised by someone to nine-fifty. There was something in the tone of the last bidder that made me rise instantly and go to the rail that separated the buyers from the office.

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I was not mistaken. It was Howard Byng, wonderful, powerful, great Howard, now of New York. He did not notice me at first. A man again among men, the clean-cut, prosperous Howard Byng, his masterly aquiline nose and acumen coping with bankers where he belonged. The one I left in the Waldorf fifteen years ago, just before they stole his property and made him a lowly fisherman. I knew, though outwardly stoical, it was a glorious moment for him. Nine-fifty was the last bid and the property was his. As he came out of a corner near the clerk's desk he made no effort to conceal his triumph and deposited with the cashier a certified check for two hundred and fifty thousand, balance to be paid when conveyance was completed.

His eyes filled with delight and eagerness when he saw me. The greeting of a big man is never noisy. His eyes were dancing as he carefully folded his receipt. I knew how he felt by the way he continued to grip my arm when leaving, there being a warmth and firm magnetism in it that delighted me—of a real man who does things, who removes obstacles with a punch and a bang.

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"Meeting you finishes it. I am satisfied. Let's go to the Waldorf. I want to sit in the same seat where I talked with you the last time. I am going to take up life from that point, where I started astray by not following your advice," he said, just as though our meeting had been arranged as part of that day's duties.

"Have you seen little Jim?" he now questioned, after we were seated in the same quiet corner.

"No; not since she left the Keys, but I know she is all right."

"Yes; she is safe and happy and learning fast. A teacher has taken a fancy to her and treats her like a daughter. No doubt, that is your work and I certainly appreciate it. I had to go back to the Keys to dispose of everything there, my store and tannery interests. She writes me the most delightful letters, one every day; in every one she mentions this teacher. She is a great girl, Wood," he added delightedly.

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"You may well be proud of her, Howard."

"Have I got time to go down to Georgia with Don to get things started again where they left off fifteen years ago, before this case goes to trial?"

"Yes, I think so. Anyhow, I can reach you easily."

"That's one of the things that remains to be done; that man must be punished," he

said savagely. "Fifteen years have changed me a great deal but I do not hate him one bit less. Killing is not enough for such vermin," he said with that deadly gleam in his eyes and the grinding of that wonderful jaw. His clean-shaven skin had a pinkish freshness and forceful virility. "And, Wood, another difficulty, strange as it may seem, presents itself—a great difficulty. I am a coward, Wood, a downright, craven coward." His fierceness softened and finally gave way to grave concern.

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"What is it?"

"When I really came to myself—after five or six years on the Keys I was yet very bitter; I had envenomed acid bitterness against—well, about everybody. Little Jim was old enough to ask questions. She asked me about her mother. I told her she was dead—dead to me as a fact. But lately, likely suggested by her association with this teacher and other girls, she has asked about her mother again and wants to see where she is buried. How am I going to meet it? And, moreover, how am I going to tell her that my name is not Canby? And how am I going to tell her—what led to it? Her mind is like a steel trap. Silence only emphasizes. What shall I do? I love the child so much I have a cowardly fear that she will not understand."

"Howard, I realize your feelings and have foreseen your difficulties. I believe I can help you—possibly at the expense of your friendship—for a time——"

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"That's impossible, Wood; you are one person to whom I must listen."

"All right, then brace yourself, for I am going to give it to you in allopathic doses. Howard, can you recall, when we last sat in this corner fifteen years ago, why I counseled caution, to 'play close' and let good enough alone?"

"Yes, just as though it was yesterday. You said I was due for a crisis, and I was weak enough to be convinced otherwise."

"Well—it so happened that I hit the nail on the head. You have been through fifteen years of fire and tribulations. I believe you have not only been fashioned into a splendid, valuable tool, but have been pretty well tempered, ground and whetted to a fine cutting edge. But it may be possible a little more fire is necessary to draw the temper to a point where it won't nick or crumble when it strikes something very hard. Do you understand me, Howard?"

"Yes, perfectly. I have made and tempered steel-cutting tools and know exactly what you mean," he replied eagerly.

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"Well, you were about thirty then; you are forty-five now, and it may be you are in for another little time, through which your natural and acquired bigness will carry you safely, but not without serious effort."

"I understand; go ahead," he urged, moving uneasily.

"Howard, no really big, useful man can afford to harbor even thoughts of revenge or bear malice or hatred toward anyone. But you have a right, in fact it is a duty, to hate the hellish or the evil in anyone."

"I see the distinction—go ahead." His eyelids twitched nervously.

"Now I'm going to put to the test your Southern blood—the vital Georgia Cracker blood that has carried you through and brought you out on top. You have just told me you still hate, fiercely hate, this man Ramund?"

"Yes—yes—he destroyed my home, he ruined me—he——"

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"Howard," I interrupted, "I know he violated every law of the decalog—but can't you think he has been pretty well punished? Everything now indicates that he will forfeit his hundred thousand bail and never return. You and I know a suitable, fearful punishment has been inflicted, and I glory with you, but what I am getting at is that you ought to hate his acts and everything he represents, but not the man himself. To hate any man is distinctly corroding and exceedingly harmful."

Howard did not reply but struggled with the fire within.

"And now that leads to a more important subject: Have you ever tried—have you ever thought of trying to find little Jim's mother?" I asked slowly, looking straight in his eyes, in fierce combat with the man's colossal will.

He did not reply at once, but slowly it came to him that he must reply.

"I—I—no!" he hesitated, I believe for the moment burning with resentment at the question. "I have closed the book in which it is written and locked it forever. I can see no possible good in even recalling it," he added, softening slightly.

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"Howard, that's the point. This is going to be the crucial test between you and me, even after all these years. Now, let us think for a moment to see if you have not yet duties to perform—to yourself, duties to her, and, more, to little Jim. Howard, as far as money goes, I know you are well fixed—again. I saw you pay nearly a million

dollars for your old property, and get it for about half-price, with no more effort than for me to buy a half dozen collars, and that brings——"

"But, Wood," he interrupted, and without resentment, "I don't believe you fully understand. I saw—waking and sane—I saw her unresisting in that man's arms receiving his lascivious caresses and kisses. Wood, at that moment I would give all I paid for that property this morning, if I could recall the slightest gesture of resentment, and for a sign or groan of agony at the ravishing insult and indignity. I would give every cent I have or shall ever earn in my life. But my ears, whetted to the keenness of the hearing of fifty men combined, detected not the slightest protest," he ended, his powerful body trembling and shocked at even recalling the distressing incident of fifteen years ago.

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"But—dismissing that phase of it, can you still escape responsibility? When you sat here with me the last time, you were intensely happy in the possession of her love and tender care, and had been for some time. Then she bore your child, she is the mother of little Jim. As a common debt of gratitude for this are you not bound now to find her and see that she is made comfortable and not in want? You owe, actually owe her in money value this much, as the mother of little Jim."

I halted in order that my words might sink deep before speaking again.

"And, Howard, something more important, you give me credit for starting you out of the pine woods. Maybe I did, but during the time you loved and was happy with her, she did more to develop the man in you than I could do in a thousand years. To overlook this is ungrateful; plain, simple ingratitude."

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It was the first time I ever saw tears in Howard Byng's eyes, big tears. His mouth twitched and he swallowed hard.

"Wood," he finally began, struggling manfully to control himself, "it may be you are right. I think you are. I should provide for her, but I don't know how to go about it. And—and there have been times lately when I have thought I was too harsh and uncompromising, but facts are pungent, bristling things no matter how much you might wish otherwise." This came in such manner from the bigness of the man that I grasped his hand eagerly.

"God bless you, Howard! I am busy, every man with red blood in our nation is busy, but I will undertake to learn something about her. You go back to Georgia. Our nation needs every ounce of turpentine and rosin you can make and needs them badly, as well as the paper and cotton. Go down there and make things hum for Uncle Sam and I will see what can be done. Also I will see little Jim. I believe I can overcome your difficulties there."

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CHAPTER XXIX

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As I suggested, Howard took Don, the old darkey, and hurried off to Georgia to put his reacquired property in working shape, utilizing the waste stumps, and cleaning the best cotton land in the world. His parting injunction was that he would return on an hour's notice, and for me to see little Jim as soon as I could find time. He would spend Christmas with her, as he had from infancy taught her the significance of it and had never failed to celebrate. He wanted her to be very happy that day.

I met Charlie Haines. He was still chasing moonshiners. I asked him if he had heard anything lately of Mrs. Byng. I knew he would easily recall her.

"Only once, Wood," he replied. "I believe she was on her way to Europe—to study. But for the life of me I can't recall just what—music, I think. That was—let me see—yes, it was a year or two before the war began and she may have been stuck there. No, she had not married, and I wonder why. I believe she was the most beautiful woman I ever saw. She was simply wonderful."

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In a day or two I started out to see little Jim. I had to coach her for the witness stand and make good my promise to Howard.

I had been losing sleep and decided to go in the chair car and have a couple hours' rest while riding, and for the first time I got a full view of myself in the big mirror in the end of the car. I was quite unable to recognize myself, and wondered how the change would affect little Jim.

You know it seems a belief among persons who should have better sense that men in our work can make a lightning change by the use of false beards, wigs and the like, when, as a matter of fact, such flimsy attempts to camouflage exist only in the poor minds of story writers and can be practiced only on the stage and in the movies; in life such a thing would be an advertisement. Even a wig is so rare that it attracts

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instant attention, and is utterly useless as a disguise.

When it seems necessary to make a change in our appearance it takes from two to three months, and as I had been undergoing such a change preparatory for something special it was a wonder Howard recognized me. It was a distinct shock when I saw myself in the mirror at the end of the car, from head to shoes.

My red wire-grass had been clipped to the skin and a broad-brimmed, low-crowned hat of a Quaker or Mennonite planted there. My beard had grown like weeds until I had a three-inch brush on my face, with the exception of my shaven upper lip. A limp, white shirt, celluloid collar and black tie, and a black Prince Albert covered my bones well below my shins, where baggy black trousers joined rough brogans laced with leather strings. Anyone could recognize in me a mountebank medicine vender, a lying horse trader or horse thief—there is not much difference between the two—or leader of some crazy religious cult, a Greenwich Village Bolsheviki or anyone who at first sight could be depended on to be tricky and irrational on serious things.

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I was afraid little Jim would not recognize me. She had developed wonderfully fast, and with a sense of humor was able to recall her first experience with me as a salesman of ship chandlery. When they sent her to me in the private office of the registrar it was hard to tell who was the more surprised. She hesitated at the door with a delightful naïveté, thinking some mistake had been made when she first saw me.

"Come in, little Jim, I want to see you."

Her face changed to mystified interest, as she closed the door and came toward me, trying her best to recognize a familiar voice who knew her as little Jim.

"It cannot be—yes, it is—oh, it is you, Mr. Wood. I never would have known you without hearing your voice," she said, giving me her hand cordially, "but you always come in such a funny way. Why didn't you bring Daddy with you? He has been promising to come for ever so long, but I am almost as glad to see you."

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"How do you like it here, little Jim?" I asked, after she was seated near me.

"I never thought there was such a fine place. The girls here are so nice and all the teachers are very kind to me—I am making splendid progress, but tell me about Daddy—where is he and how did everything turn out?"

I took great pains to detail all that happened after she left and the success of her father. By this means I prepared her to testify in a natural way and told her he had bought a big plant in Georgia where he was now, but that he would return before Christmas. She asked a great many questions in open-eyed wonder, her early training in practical business enabling her to understand easily, but when through she lapsed into manifest disappointment.

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"Then I will never go back to the Keys to live? And I won't have my boat *Titian*, and won't Daddy have the *Sprite*? And Don—what will become of old Don?"

"You will either live in New York or down in Georgia, but he has kept your *Titian*, and made the *Sprite* over for his own use. Don went South with him."

"But, then, I will never see my flowers, or Nereid, or hear the music among the beautiful plants and forests at the bottom of the Gulf? Oh, I would like to hear the sweet music of the sea again. Do you know that sometimes our music instructress plays for me so delightfully I can almost go to sleep as I wanted to down in the water? She is wonderful and has been so kind to me; I wonder why I never had a mother? I have asked Daddy about my mother, and asked him to take me to where she is buried. All the other girls here have mothers they love so much, and if I saw where she was buried I would love her, too, as they do their living mothers. You have known Daddy a long time. Did you know my mother, too?" she asked sorrowfully.

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"Yes, I knew your mother long before you were born."

"Oh, Mr. Wood, tell me—what was she like. I have always wanted to know. Daddy never liked to talk about it. One of my teachers, the one I room with, who is so good to me when I get lonesome, has asked me. Tell me, Mr. Wood," she asked, leaning toward me impulsively, her eyes shining like bright stars.

"Little Jim," I began, rising and looking out on the beautiful winter scene, "when you were about a year old your father lived here in New York and had a great deal of trouble and to get away from it all he took you and Don in the schooner *Canby* and went out to sea. After many days you were wrecked on the Keys and went by the name of Canby ever since."

"Then my real name is not Canby? What is it? Was that when my mother died?" she asked, all at once, coming to my side at the window and timidly taking hold of my hand. "And you have not told me what she was like," she added, though apparently assured there was nothing dishonorable.

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"No—little Jim—I think it is right for you to know that your mother did not die then, and it is not certain that she is dead. She was a very beautiful woman."

"But Daddy told me she was dead," looking up confidently, her eyes large with inquiry.

"He meant she was dead to him, and did not feel able to explain. Can you understand it?"

"Daddy is my only wonderful Daddy and would not tell me anything if it was not best, but I am older now and can know more. Tell me, Mr. Wood."

"Little Jim, I have told you enough now. You will have to come down to New York pretty soon to this trial as I explained; then I may tell you more," I said, laying my hand on her head convincingly.

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"Will Daddy be there, too?"

"Yes; he will be there, too, and also remember to talk to no one about this matter; the school authorities understand. It is nearly time for me to go and I must see the registrar and bid her good-bye," I said, leading her out of the office into a sort of a big hall or rotunda. She ran at once to someone across the big room who had apparently been hovering about waiting for her and who scanned me mercilessly. I knew instantly it was the teacher to whom she referred so often, and the sight of her made my heart jump.

"Yes," said the registrar when I found him, "I will send her down any time you want her with this teacher who, under my instructions, has shared her room ever since she came. They have grown to be great friends; she is perfectly safe with her."

CHAPTER XXX

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The case of "The United States vs. Ramund, *et al.*," crawled up slowly on the trial calendar until the work of getting the jury began—three days before Christmas. I wired Howard when to be there, and made arrangements at the Waldorf Hotel for him, also little Jim and her escort, and sent for them as soon as I thought the jury would be completed.

The two suites I engaged at the hotel were entered from a wing off the main hall on that floor. A big front one for little Jim and her escort, a smaller one across the hall I occupied until Howard came. A maid I brought in saw to it that our witness was not molested.

The jockeying of the defense for time disgusted the court and everyone else, though it suited me because our star witness, Howard, was delayed. I knew little Jim had arrived, but did not actually see her for reasons that will appear.

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Howard did not arrive until the afternoon before Christmas, with the defense still obstructing the progress of the trial. Pushed hard late in the afternoon they admitted they could not produce a single one of the defendants. Their bonds were immediately declared forfeited, and court adjourned for the holidays. I had to attend to some detail. I told Howard to go to the hotel and get cleaned up. I would meet him there soon. He misunderstood me and before I knew it was assigned rooms in another part of the hotel. Then I went for the first time to see little Jim, ostensibly to tell her that she would not have to appear as a witness.

She came to the door at my ring and was very much delighted to see me, leading me to her teacher and escort in the front room of the suite and introducing me with polite formality.

Her teacher started visibly at her clear pronunciation of the name and asked me to be seated, her eyes trying to penetrate my incongruous appearance.

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"I—I once knew a Mr. Wood, but it is a long time since I have seen him. It—it can't be that you—that you know him—I should like very much to see him," she said, glancing with a sort of affectionate apprehension at little Jim, who stood near me.

"Perhaps fifteen years of wear and tear has been more severe on me than it has on yourself. It has laid a kindly hand on you, but if you can imagine me as divested of this ancient coat and transfer these whiskers to the bare spot on my head it may help you some," I said, trying to get into lighter vein.

"Then you are——" she hesitated, almost devouring me with her astonished eyes, "can it be possible you are the Mr. Wood I once knew, the friend——"

"Yes; quite the same," I interrupted, in order to allow her plenty of time in which to

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control herself.

"Have you—have you any news? I should like to see you alone, Mr. Wood," she requested, looking at little Jim in a frightened way.

"It isn't necessary. This little girl and I are very good friends. She can hear everything. In fact, I want her to," I replied, drawing little Jim down on a hassock beside me, "I have important news for you," I added, looking full at the wonderful, sweet, earnest and time-refined Norma Byng.

"Tell me—tell me quickly. I don't care if the whole world hears—is he alive and—is he well?" she asked excitedly, her bosom rising spasmodically with the deep breathing of intense excitement.

"Yes, I will tell you, but you must be calm, and control yourself. You may be put to a terrible test with the possibility of failure. And you, little girl, must pay close attention and not miss a single word," said I, laying my hand on little Jim's shoulder, who was wide-eyed in wonder at the turn of things.

"Your husband, Howard, has returned after having completely rehabilitated his magnificent self in all ways. He has even regained control of his property, his plant in Georgia, and completely recovered from a state of practical insanity that held him for several years—but he has not recovered wholly from the shock given him by this man Ramund——"

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"And he still believes that I—oh, what shall I do! There has never been a moment that I have not loved him and would now willingly give my life—but my child, my little Norma, what of her? I have lived in constant hope she would be restored to me."

"About two years ago in the course of my employment I learned where you were. Afterward I found Howard and little Jim. She had to go to school, so I conceived and was able to carry out a quiet or rather a deceptive plan to bring all three of you together. You have had your child in your care for more than four months. Little Jim, this is your mother, of whom you wanted me to tell you," I said, raising her to her feet for Norma Byng to embrace passionately in a flood of tears.

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"I knew it—I felt it! From the moment I saw her first I felt a bond; we have loved each other deeply without knowing what we were to each other!" she exclaimed, holding little Jim so that she could see her face, and who by this time was also in tears of joy.

"I was afraid you would trace the great resemblance to yourself when her tan came off and her hair grew out," I said, trying to be calm myself.

"Then this is my mother!" screamed the delighted little Jim. "Oh, I have wished a hundred times I could call you mother and now I have my wish!" Then she began to dance up and down as though on springs, finally throwing her arms about her mother's neck and kissing her repeatedly between happy little sobs of joy unconfined.

Holding tightly to her darling child there came into the face of Norma Byng an intense sadness, her lips quivered. Intuitively, I knew what she was going to ask.

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"Where is Howard? Is he unrelenting—is he not yet convinced?"

"No, he is not. His fierce Georgia nature, the hot blood of the South, stands in the way. I have tried and I am going to try again, so you must be prepared—even for failure. I am not at all sure of success. I am going out to try and find him now. While I am gone you might tell little Jim the whole story. She is a big little girl—just like her truly great mother and father. She will understand and it may help. He loves little Jim as his only love," I said, starting away from the reunited mother and child. It was time for them to be alone.

"Shall we wait?" asked Norma Byng, weeping softly.

"Yes, wait till I return."

After a lot of telephoning and explaining to clerks and bell boys, I finally succeeded in getting Howard's things transferred to the suite intended for him. He was looking for me and I for him with the result that it was late when we got together.

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His first question was of little Jim. I had to be very careful when telling him how I had informed her about her new name. But he was much pleased and relieved that she knew. Then he began to talk about business. His disappointment at the turn things had taken in court was somewhat assuaged by the information that two hundred thousand dollars in cash had been forfeited to the United States by Ramund's default in appearance.

He then began to tell me of the great progress he had made on his property, the stump pullers were again at work and things were going very well at the plant in Georgia.

"Did you hear of anyone moonshining in the swamps?"

"Well, I guess they are making a little liquor over there somewhere, but the old gang, the one you and I knew about, is not there," he replied, smiling.

"You didn't have time to go up to Alligator Island for a shot, did you?"

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"No—and I don't believe I ever will go there again," he replied, sobering quickly, his face even saddening. "By the way, did you learn anything—of her? I suppose you have been too busy?"

"Yes, I have heard—I have some very important news. I know where she is. She is now, and always has been employed, and she is a more cultured, more wonderful woman than ever, Howard."

"It's a terrible thing, Wood. I wish that snake Ramund had been sent up for life, or hung, as he should be. It is strange how life continually presents great difficulties and disappointments."

"Howard, your case is not as bad as others. Your wife still loves you, and I don't believe she has ever wavered a moment. I wish you would see it that way."

"But, Wood, I may be able to forgive, but such a wrong I could not forget. It's the way of the South. We never forget. I have thought this terrible matter over ten thousand times, but was unable to deceive my own eyes—I saw. Sometimes I wish I had not seen."

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Howard sat at the corner of the table and rested his powerful jaw in his palm gloomily. He was obstinate and so was I and thus matters stood when I began to pace the floor. I had become just as determined as he. Abruptly I stopped and looked him in the eye.

"Howard," said I, "there is no need of your being deceived. Norma Byng was then and is now as pure as driven snow—pure as an angel."

"You can only guess at that. You did not see—as I did. I would give up my hope of a future life not to have seen what I did. I will admit I love her as much as I ever did. I know it now—I wish I didn't," he said sadly. "It is one thing I must bear—one of the burdens of life," he added, depressed, but terribly firm.

"Howard, my whole life has been spent in learning what people think as much as what they do. And you have had plenty of evidence that I succeed. I tell you Norma Byng is innocent—guilty of nothing except one great indiscreet effort to aid you. She was led to believe she could. Time has not dimmed her ardent love for you one iota."

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"I wish I were sure of it, but I could never be. I am, as I should be, very glad I have little Jim to love, for a man must have someone to love and work for."

"Howard, you have got to be bigger than that. You have succeeded a second time, and you are now more re-established materially; besides, you have done yourself honor—you have been the means of performing for this country a service that cannot be estimated—"

"No—Wood, you did it. It was all you, and I offer you again a half interest in the business, and this time you have got to take it. It's yours. I would never have regained it without your help."

"Howard," I said, grabbing him by the arms and raising him to his feet in a supreme determination to break his will, "from the first time I saw you until this moment you have had plenty of evidence of my friendship. I have never advised you wrong. I am not doing so now. As you stand there, resisting all reason, I spurn your offer and fling it from me as I would plunge tempered steel into the enemy. Our friendship is now being weighed for real values." My voice shook, for I was terribly in earnest as I continued:

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"I tell you that you are wrong! As she has no one else to defend her, I shall. Hear me when I say that Norma Byng never had an impure or unchaste thought in her life. The Hun's proposal stunned her; shocked her beyond the power to move or speak. You ought to understand such a possibility. I have heard her story. Dissimulation in her is unthinkable. And what I say I know is not guesswork, but the result of a careful, painstaking search for your happiness, hers, and little Jim's. Howard, it is Christmas eve. Do you hear those bells ringing out to the world—peace and good will to men? Look at these papers," said I, taking out the original warrants for one Canby. "Take a look at them and judge for yourself whether or not I was won to your cause by little Jim first—her little Jim as much as yours—because she looked like, and reminded me of Norma Byng. Suppose I had given these papers to the marshall to serve. Can't you see why—it was little Jim, whom she brought into the world. Drop your distrust. Let your love light the way and come with me," I said impulsively, taking him by the hand and leading him across the hall.

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Little Jim came to the door again, as soon as she heard my voice.

"Oh, Daddy, how late you are. We have been waiting for you so long. I know everything now. Come in here, Daddy, we have been waiting for you—my mother and I," she cried, leading her father by the hand just as I had done. I followed them into the front room. Little Jim led him straight to Norma, took her mother's hand and placed it in his. My emotions were hard to control. I knew that the child had done more in a moment than I could ever have done. What had been torn asunder was now reunited in holy bond.

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Little Jim told me afterward she had seen a wonderful transformation and was thrilled by heavenly voices, just as she had been when she visited Nereid, at the bottom of the sea. It was then that Norma and Howard Byng became truly great, and sacred to little Jim and me. We tiptoed out and went over to Howard's room across the hall. Anyone who in sheer ghoulishness would have desecrated this holy reunion by listening to their tender words and witness their caresses must indeed stand in need of better manners, to say the least.

It seemed but a short time until they came to where we were and together they placed their hands in mine, with joyous little Jim standing between us. They were about to speak of their obligation to me when there floated up from the great music room below a glorious chorus, clear as a bell, and of infinite sweetness—"Peace on Earth Good Will to Men."

Next morning I found Howard and little Jim in the office looking over timetables. They both came toward me smiling, Howard a changed man—a wonderful transformation had taken place. He took my hand, offered in congratulation, and squeezed it hard. Said he, "Wood, I am going away; no more business for a long time. I am going to celebrate a real wedding."

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Then, in a voice coming from his heart, soft with emotion, he added, "The remainder of my life shall be spent righting a tremendous wrong. I have just commenced to live."

Transcriber's note:

Minor spelling inconsistencies, mainly hyphenated and accented words, have been made consistent.

Obvious typographical errors have been corrected.

Any missing page numbers are those given to blank pages in the original text.

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