NATURAL CAUSES

MISS PHYLLIS ETHERINGTON, conscious of a sudden chilliness in her toes, crossly drew those extremities into a less adventurous position and endeavoured to recompose herself to slumber. But she was aware, even in the semi-stupor in which she lay, of a certain element of disturbance in her surroundings. Her pillow felt extremely hard, and the sun appeared to be streaming through her cabin skylight with unusual ferocity. Had she overslept herself, she wondered? How about breakfast? She must have lain long. Had she been called? Certainly she was beginning to feel thoroughly restless. Something rigid and unyielding was pressing against her ribs. A book, perhaps: she was in the habit of reading late in bed and dropping off to sleep, the volume under perusal usually being retrieved somewhere in the neighbourhood of the hot-water bottle in the morning. Should she make an effort now, or—the sluggard’s inevitable alternative—give herself just five minutes longer?

The question was settled for her. Her toes were once again sending up signals for help, and their appeal was backed ten seconds later by a sudden splash of water, which broke over the sleeper’s feet and deluged her to the knees.

Miss Etherington sat up suddenly, to realise that she had mistaken her whereabouts. It was a dream reversed. Instead of tumbling out of fairyland to wake up in bed, she had tumbled out of bed to wake up in fairyland.

She was sitting upon a sunny shore—a concave arc of shelving yellow sand, with blue and white wavelets lazily rolling up and down the declivity. One of these broke gently over her bare feet for the third time.
Woman-like, she took a lightning inventory of her costume—and gave a little gasp of dismay. Her toilet presented the appearance of having been begun in haste and not finished at all. Her long hair, dank but luxurious, flowed down to her waist. A saxe-blue serge skirt fluttered round her bare ankles. Her most adequate article of attire was a cork life-belt, fastened round her quilted dressing-gown. She was stiff and aching in every limb.

She remembered all now. The yacht—the tropical hurricane—the grinding crash in the dead of night—the trampling of feet overhead and the hoarse shouting of men—the heeling decks and flapping ropes—a pair of hands which had hurried her along the sloping alleyways and passed her down into a heaving cockle-shell—finally, the great green wave which had swung up out of the darkness and fallen upon them all and carried her down, down, down, until she lost consciousness. And here she was, cast up and alive upon a warm sandy beach. The life-belt was responsible for that, she supposed. She had no recollection of having put it on, though. Probably the hands which hurried her on deck had attended to that. There was a number on it: *S.Y. Island Queen, R.Y.S.—State-Room No. 3*. The number of her state-room was seven, so this could not be the belt which she had noticed rolled up in a rack above her berth, lazily wondering if she would ever need it.

Then, as her senses adjusted themselves, came the inevitable inquiry: "Where were the others? Her host, that cheerful, kindly old nobleman, was he gone? What a death for a man reputed to know the Pacific as most amateurs know the Solent! And the Arthur Denholms? And Colonel Shiel? And Margaret Alderston? And "—Miss Etherington’s exquisite features hardened for a moment—"Leslie Gale?"

Then her face softened again. Death closes all accounts. Leslie Gale, lying peacefully in twenty fathoms of blue water, could never again do anything to increase or diminish the sum-total of his account with her—an account opened, run up, audited, and found incorrect in every possible way within a brief but extremely stormy period of three weeks. That vendetta was at an end, anyway.

Why had she come to dislike him so intensely? she wondered. Was it because he had asked her to marry him? Apparently not; for in that case she should at this moment
be cherishing the bitterest feelings towards some seventeen other gentlemen, mostly of blameless character and antecedents, who had at various periods mooted the same proposition. Was it because he had proposed to her after an acquaintance of three days? No; one man had done so after one ball, and she had felt rather flattered. She had disliked Leslie Gale from the moment of their first meeting. He had not treated her with the respect—that is, the servility—to which she was accustomed. She objected also to the manner in which he had treated his dismissal. True, he had not behaved violently or idiotically, like most of the others. On the contrary, he had exhibited most exasperating detachment of mind about it, and had talked—no, chatted to her about herself in a manner which she resented very much. He had appeared almost sorry for her.

"You are in a difficult position," he said musingly, at that point in their interview at which a right-minded lover would have departed, with drawn features, into the night. "You are a girl with brains and character—and a bit of a spoiled child into the bargain. You cannot love a man who is your mental and moral inferior, and you are too opinionated and conceited to give in to your superior. So you fall between two stools."

At this she had been unable to resist the temptation of a crushing retort.

"Are you my superior?" she rapped out.

"Yes."

"Joy! He had fallen into the trap."

"Then"—maliciously—"why don't you subdue me?"

On paper, there was no answer to this question; but this bumptious young man had replied without hesitation:

"Because you won't stand your ground. You will run away."

"Why should I run away—from you?" inquired Miss Etherington icily.

"Because," replied Mr. Gale, "you are afraid of me."

"Indeed?"

"Yes."

"Then you think you will subdue me?"

"No," he said frankly—"I don't. You won't give me the chance. Modern civilisation deprives man of many of his weapons. If we were shut up together on a desert island, or if we had lived in the cave-dwelling period——"
"You would have subdued me with a flint axe, I suppose," said Miss Etherington scornfully.

"No, not at all. There would have been no need. If I had wanted you I should have used the flint axe to settle the pretensions of your other suitors, and then picked you up and carried you off."

"It is possible," said Miss Etherington gently, "that I might not have come."

"Yes, you would. You would have come gladly, knowing that the best man had got you; and that is all a woman really cares about."

"If you honestly believe that," replied Miss Etherington almost compassionately, "all I can say is that your intelligence is even more unfounded than I suspected. When you have seen a little more of the world you will realise that mankind has progressed beyond the schoolboy attitude towards life. Women are now free agents."

"Yes. And I'm not sure," remarked the experienced Mr. Gale, "that there are as many happy marriages under the new system as the old. Women are notoriously bad judges of a man. I shall watch your future career with interest, Miss Etherington—interest and apprehension. In matters of the heart I mistrust your judgment."

He rose.

"Now," he said, "if you would like to have the last word you had better say it at once; because it is getting late, and the rest of the party may be wondering what you and I are discussing under the lee of the chart-house."

At this Miss Etherington had risen from her seat and sailed silently and majestically aft.

That was a fortnight ago. Since then, in the constricted space of a yacht, friction had been inevitable. Miss Etherington at first made an attempt to avoid Mr. Gale's society, but relinquished this on being taunted with "running away." So she changed her tactics, and treated Mr. Gale with excessive sprightliness in public and cold disdain in private. Here she was more successful. Gale's flippant and philosophical detachment did not wear well. He maintained a careless and semi-humorous pose for about a week, and then one evening, under the baneful influence of a full round moon, suddenly crumpled up and descended to sentimental entreaty. Miss Etherington, perceiving that he had delivered himself into her hands, let him run on for nearly ten minutes, and then
gave free rein to a rather exceptional talent for biting sarcasm. Gale’s amorous expansiveness collapsed like a punctured balloon at the first stab; and feeling hot and foolish and being a man, he lost his temper, and said things which should not be said to a lady, however provoking.

Then followed seven days of open hostility. Finally one night, when the indefatigable Mrs. Arthur Denholm organised a dance on the deck under the awning, Leslie Gale, who hated feuds, summoned his entire stock of common sense and courage, and asked Miss Etherington for a waltz.

He met with a flat refusal, for which he was fully prepared. He persisted.

"Nonsense!" he said. "Come on! Just a little turn! It will do us both good," he added meaningly.

Without further entreaty he placed an arm round Miss Etherington’s slim waist, and trundled her unresisting but unresponsive form twice round the deck. Then, a little blown by the considerable exertion involved, he paused, and remarked cheerfully:

"That was splendid!"

Miss Etherington swiftly released her waist from his arm, and crossed the deck to where one Ommaney, a callow and cub-like member of the company, was lolling against a stanchion.

"Billy dear," she said, with an entrancing smile, "will you dance with me?"

Billy, much flattered, complied.

An hour later Miss Etherington, on her way to bed, found her path barred by Mr. Leslie Gale, who was standing at the foot of the companion. His face was white, and his teeth chattered gently—but not with cold or fear.

"Let me pass, please," said Miss Etherington, rather nervously.

"I only wanted to say," answered Mr. Gale in a voice which Miss Etherington had never heard before, "that I think you are the most ill-bred and detestable girl I have ever met. You may pass now."

That was last night—say twelve hours ago. And now Leslie Gale was dead, lying with the wreck of the yacht deep down beside the coral reef that had wrecked them. Dead! And so were the others, too all seeming. She gazed round—at the horse-shoe curve of the little bay; at the palm-covered slopes behind her; at the boiling surge outside the bar. Was
she utterly alone? She was a plucky young woman and declined to be frightened until she was sure.

She sprang resolutely to her feet and set out inland. Not far off uprose a little hill. From the summit of this she could survey her kingdom and take an inventory of its possibilities. She was not beaten yet. Her pulse beat high. Her small bare toes resolutely crimped the sand.

Meanwhile, behind an adjacent sandhill, following the movements of his beloved with breathless interest, lay Mr. Leslie Gale. He chuckled gently. His chief asset in life—some people considered it a liability—was a strong if somewhat untimely sense of humour. Not even a recent escape from a watery grave could damp his enjoyment of the situation. He sat up in his rapidly drying pyjamas, and slapped himself feebly.

"My sainted aunt!" he murmured brokenly. "I shall have to get a flint axe!"

II

MISS ETHERINGTON, white-lipped and struggling gamely with the terrors of utter loneliness, lay face downward upon a patch of coral sand. She had completed her survey of the island, which was not much larger than a couple of full-sized golf-courses; and lo! it was her exclusive property. There were no habitations, and no inhabitants. She lay very still, holding herself in. Once or twice her shoulders heaved.

Suddenly, like music from heaven, the sound of a discreet and thoroughly British cough fell upon her ears, and in a moment the cobweb of terror which was beginning to enshroud her senses was swept away. Hardly believing her good fortune, she sprang up, tossed back her hair from her eyes—and found herself face to face with Mr. Leslie Gale.

"Oh!" she gasped. "You?"

"Yes—just me!" he replied. "There is nobody else."

"And are all the others—?" She pointed to the tumbling seas outside the bar.

"I don't know," replied Gale, interpreting the question. "Very likely most of them got away in the lifeboat. You were in the cutter, you know."

"If they escaped, wouldn't they have landed here?" said the girl doubtfully.
"I'm not so sure. That squall which struck us was the tail-end of a cyclone. They may have been swept out to sea. In fact," he added, covertly regarding Miss Etherington's white face and troubled eyes, "I am sure they were. I saw them get clear away myself. Anyhow, they are not here. I have been all over the island to see."

"Are there any traces?"

"Yes, but not of human beings. Chiefly spars and gratings. I collected all I could: they may be useful for—domestic purposes."

It was not, perhaps, a very happy way of putting it. Miss Etherington flushed, and demanded:

"What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. We may have to stay here for months. Are you an expert in household management? Can you tend the fireside, while I labour to keep the home together?"

"I can't live here alone with you for months," cried the girl desperately.

"I am afraid it can't be helped," said Mr. Gale. "We may get taken off by some passing vessel, but for the present you must be content to live the life of a cave-woman."

Miss Etherington caught the allusion, and her spirit responded instantaneously to the implied challenge.

"First find your cave!" she replied disdainfully.

"By the greatest luck in the world," announced Mr. Gale calmly, "I have already done so. Come and see."

He led the way along the seashore, eager to exhibit his discovery. Miss Etherington rebelliously following. Already, she reflected, primitive man was asserting himself: in a procession of two she walked in the rear.

"Presently he will expect me to fetch and carry," she said to herself. "Let him dare!"

The cave lay close to the water's edge, in a tiny cove facing south. It ran back some fifteen feet into the heart of a lofty rock, and was floored with white coral sand, warm and dry beneath the rays of the noonday sun which streamed in through the doorway.

"Somewhere to sleep, at any rate," commented Mr. Gale cheerfully. "But what chiefly concerns me at present is the discovery of something to eat. Come and find coconuts."

Once more the procession moved off, its order unaltered. A coconut palm was speedily found, and Mr. Gale embarked upon a brief gymnastic display, which presently furnished
them with a supply of solid and liquid refreshment of which both our islanders stood in considerable need.

"This landscape," said Gale, as he sat contentedly sunning himself after the fashion of man when fed, "reminds me of North Berwick Links, with a few palms dotted about and no tourists. There is Point Garry." He indicated the little promontory in which their cave was situated.

"Have you climbed to the top yet, partner?" he continued.

"No," said Miss Etherington shortly; "I have not."

"Well, you shall," said Mr. Gale kindly. "We may see things from there which have hitherto escaped our notice. No good sitting here moping!"

With great energy he led the way to Point Garry and scaled the heights, assisting his companion from time to time.

"We will now scan the horizon," he announced, when they reached the top. "I think that is what Robinson Crusoe would have done under the circumstances. No—nothing! Nothing to be seen but those big rocks jutting up out of the water over there. I noticed them this morning. They look like a row of teeth, don't they?" he inquired chattily.

"I fail to observe any resemblance," replied Miss Etherington.

"No? Well, I was always quick at noticing things from a child," said Mr. Gale, with unimpaired bonhomie. "We are not all blessed with good imagin—— Hallo! what's that?" He seized the girl's arm in unaffected excitement, and pointed.

"You are holding my arm," said Miss Etherington coldly.

"Let go, please!"

Mr. Gale had already done so, in order to make a pair of binoculars of his hands.

"Do you see something projecting up between the two middle teeth?" he asked. "I think—I think—yes, it is—the bow of a ship! It must be the yacht. It is the yacht! I can see the top of her funnel. She must have grounded there. I was right. It was a cyclone. The wind has been playing a perfect game of rounders with itself."

"Do you think there is anyone on board?" asked Miss Etherington, suddenly hopeful. After all, a steward or a coal-trimmer would be something with which to dilute Mr. Gale. Another woman seemed too much to expect.

"I doubt it, but I will see," said Mr. Gale.

"How?"
"I am going to swim out."
"All that way?"
"Yes; not more than half-a-mile, I fancy."
"Supposing there are—"
Miss Etherington paused, suddenly remembering that the
man beside her was unworthy of solicitude.
"Sharks—eh? Perhaps, but I must risk it. If I meet
one I will make a noise like a company promoter, and he'll
merely bow respectfully. Do you know what that old hull
means to us? Blankets, tools, food! Perhaps they have left
a boat on board."
"Can you swim half-a-mile?" inquired Miss Etherington.
"It is just about my limit," confessed Mr. Gale frankly.
"but I can try."
"Would you"—Miss Etherington wavered between
common humanity and a feminine desire not to offer anything
which could be construed into encouragement—"care to have
my cork-jacket?"
"If you are quite sure you won't catch a chill without it,"
replied Mr. Gale tenderly.
He proceeded to buckle on the jacket, apparently oblivious
of a look which to a thinner-skinned man would have made
drowning seem an easy death, and scrambled over the rocks
to the water's edge. He poised himself upon a convenient
taking-off place.
"Back to tea!" he cried, and disappeared with a splash.
It is not easy to dive cleanly in a cork jacket.
Presently he reappeared, and struck out boldly in the direc-
tion of Double-Tooth Islet. Miss Etherington, seated upon
the summit of Point Garry, her round chin resting on her
hands, followed the course of his black head as it slowly forged
its way across the limpid channel. Many thoughts passed
through her mind. On the one hand, she hated Mr. Leslie
Gale to the fullest extent of a nature more than usually well
endowed for the purpose. On the other, she knew that there
were sharks in these seas—she had seen them. Even now
she could descry in the wake of Mr. Gale a tiny black dot
which might or might not be the dreaded triangular fin. She
closed her eyes, and kept them tightly shut for more than
half-an-hour.
When she opened them, a figure, silhouetted against the
skyline upon the summit of Double Tooth Islet, was trium-
phantly semaphoring safe arrival. Miss Etherington did not
reply. Instead, she rolled gently over on to her side in a dead faint.

After all, as she argued to herself when she came to, she had had a most exhausting twenty-four hours, and her sole diet had been a portion of coconuts.

III

Mr. Gale returned more expeditiously than he had set out, adequately clothed and propelling the yacht’s dinghy, which was loaded to the water’s edge with miscellaneous stores.

“Help me to unload these things, quickly,” he called to Miss Etherington, “and carry them up to the cave. I must go out to the yacht again before she slips off.”

“Will you take me with you this time?” asked Miss Etherington.

“Why?”

“I want some things out of my cabin,” was the prim reply.

“I’m afraid you haven’t got a cabin any more,” said Gale. “The stern half of the ship is under water, and I’m salvaging all I can from the forward part. However, I will select a wardrobe for you from what is available. I always had great natural taste.”

He paddled away so quickly that Miss Etherington had no time effectively to ignore this last pleasantry. When Mr. Gale returned an hour later he found her still sitting beside the heap of stores on the shore.

“The yacht is lifting with the swell,” he announced. “She is just hanging on by her eyebrows now. Rolled over fifteen degrees a minute ago. Gave me a nasty turn, I can tell you, down in the lazarette grubbing for tinned sardines—for you. They are rather a favourite delicacy of yours, aren’t they? Hallo! Why haven’t you carried up some of these stores? Tired?”

Miss Etherington, who had been rehearsing her part for this scene for the past hour, replied icily:

“I am not accustomed to be ordered about.”

Gale, who was lifting a heavy box out of the boat—the carpenter’s tool-chest—laid down his burden and sat on it.

“Insubordination? I’m—a serious matter!” he observed. “We must hold a court-martial this evening.”

He rose, and continued: “As you don’t appear inclined to assist me to furnish the Home, perhaps you will kindly repair
to the Home itself. I will carry this case up for you, and you shall unpack it. Then you can make the place snug with a few deft feminine touches. When I have finished my day’s work I shall expect to find my slippers toasting at the fender. That is always done, I believe. Do not butter them, though, or Darby will have a few words to address to Joan. You will find me a fearful domestic tyrant.”

Miss Etherington, dimly wondering whether this excursion into the realms of humour masked a threat or merely indicated mental vacuity of the hollowest type, rose from her seat and departed in the direction of the cave. But she did not halt there. Instead, she climbed to the summit of Point Garry, and there sat for a full hour surveying the sunset with an expression upon her features for which a competent under-nurse would have prescribed just one remedy.

The red-hot coppery ball of the sun dropped into the sea so suddenly that one almost expected to hear it sizzle, and the warm darkness of a tropical night rushed down from the heavens. Stars sprang out upon the velvety sky.

“Partner! ” called a voice from below.

“I won’t—I won’t!” muttered the girl to herself between her clenched teeth.

There was a pause, and then she heard the feet of Mr. Gale climbing the rocky path which led to her eyrie. Presently his head appeared above the edge.

“Shall I bring your supper up to you, or will you come down to it?” he inquired. “I may mention that there is an extra charge for serving meals above stairs. Your food will cost you more, so to speak.”

Miss Etherington was in no mood for badinage of this kind.

“I will come,” she said stonily.

A bright fire was burning at the mouth of the cave, and a stew of a primitive but inviting character was bubbling in an iron pot hung over the blaze. Crates and cases had been piled into a neat rampart round their demesne. Over the cave mouth itself Mr. Gale had hung a stout curtain of sailcloth.

“Be seated, Miss Etherington,” said Mr. Gale. “That is your place.”

He pointed to a seat upon the sand, fashioned out of boat cushions propped against the base of the rock.

Miss Etherington obeyed.

“This is a one-course dinner,” continued Mr. Gale in
deprecating tones, "but I have no doubt that when you take matters in hand you will be able to turn out something more pretentious. What will you drink? I have a bottle of brandy, which had better be reserved for medicinal purposes, and a dozen stone ginger which I have retrieved from the wreck at great personal risk, knowing it to be a weakness of yours. We must not be reckless about it. An occasional bottle on special occasions—birthdays and Christmases. I think to-night comes under the head of special occasions. Say when!"

Babbling in this light-hearted strain, Mr. Gale proceeded to do the honours of the feast, incidentally making a hearty meal himself. Miss Etherington ate nothing to speak of.

When he had finished, Leslie Gale punctiliously asked for permission to smoke, and lit his pipe.

"I wonder how long half-a-pound of tobacco will last me?" he mused, puffing comfortably. "A month, perhaps, with care. How ripping the moon looks on the water!"

Miss Etherington did not reply. Her eyes were set. Gale stood up.

"Bed-time," he announced. "You are tired. Come and see your room."

He lit a candle and screwed it into the neck of a bottle. The flame hardly flickered in the soft air.

"Please walk in," he said, holding back the sailcloth flap.

Miss Etherington obeyed, mechanically.

In one corner of the cave Gale had constructed a sleeping-place of blankets and boat-cushions. On a convenient ledge lay a tin basin; beside it stood a bucket of fair water. Even soap was there. A deal chest served for chair and wardrobe.

Leslie Gale held the candle aloft.

"What do you think of me as an upholsterer?" he asked with pride. "I will see about electric bells and a hot-water tap in the morning."

Miss Etherington made no reply.

Gale set down the candle on the ledge.

"Is there anything else I can do for you in here?" he asked.

"No, thank you."

"Quite sure? It is the last time of asking."

Struck by a curious note in his voice, the girl looked up suddenly.

"Why?" she said.
Their eyes met. Mr. Gale’s, which were usually remarkable only for a self-satisfied twinkle, were grey and steely.

"Because," he said slowly, "I do not intend to invade your privacy again. Hereafter this cave is yours—utterly and absolutely—to withdraw to whenever again you feel inclined, as you did to-day, to doubt my ability to behave like a gentleman. Good-night!"

He turned towards the curtained doorway.

"Where—where are you going to shelter?" inquired a low voice behind him.

"On the beach—between a couple of oyster-shells!" he replied. "Good-night!"

A childish and flippant rejoinder, the reader will admit, utterly spoiling what might have been a dignified—nay, heroic—exit from the cave. But Leslie Gale was never one to let the sun go down upon his wrath, or mistake the theatrical for the dramatic.

IV

Miss Etherington awoke next morning to find the sun beating upon the sail-cloth curtain. Half-dazed, and failing for a moment to realise her surroundings, she uttered a stifled cry.

A shadow fell upon the curtain.

"Shriek once for the boots, twice for the chambermaid, three times for the waiter," advised a cheerful voice. "Breakfast is served."

Ten minutes later Miss Etherington found herself subdued but hungry, partaking of fresh fish fried in oatmeal.

"Any amount of nourishment to be had for the asking over there by those rocks," said the chef. "It’s lucky. We have enough tinned stuff to last us for months; but tinned turkey and tinned plum-pudding both taste very much alike after a few weeks; so these little fellows”—he helped himself to another fish—"will serve to drive away monotony. Have some cocoa?"

"I hate cocoa," replied Miss Etherington, with a return of her old petulance. Gale’s assumption that they were settled upon the island for life angered her, as usual.

"Members," gabbled the incorrigible Mr. Gale, "are requested not to chastise the club servants personally, but to enter all complaints upon the backs of their bills, which will
be considered by the Committee at its next session. But I am sorry you don’t like cocoa. I will try and find some coffee for you. I am going to make a final trip to the yacht after breakfast.”

“Is she still there, then?”

“Yes, I have been out already this morning. I don’t think the old thing will hang on much longer, though. There is a heavy swell outside. By the way, do you know why Robinson Crusoe was not alone when he landed on his island? Give it up? Because he found a heavy swell on the beach and a little cove running up the sand... No?”—as Miss Etherington remained quite impervious to this outrage. “Well, perhaps not! It might go better with a larger audience. It used to be received with rapture in the schoolroom at home. I thought perhaps—however, to resume. Is there anything else you require before the yacht goes under?”

“Yes—hairpins,” said Miss Etherington unexpectedly.

“I’m afraid not,” said Gale. “The only cabins not under water by this time are the engineers’, and engineers always wear their hair bobbed, as you know. But really”—he respectfully scrutinised his companion’s tumbled mane—“it looks very nice as it is.”

Miss Etherington, upon whom last night’s lesson had not been wasted, smiled, for the first time since their landing; and Mr. Gale was conscious deep down in his heart, which possibly was not so light as his tongue, of a tiny thrill of satisfaction and relief. Was this peace—or merely an armistice?

“I must go now,” he said. “After that we will formally annex our kingdom and draw up a constitution.”

“If you are sure it is quite safe on the yacht?” asked Miss Etherington rather anxiously, staring under her hand at the lazy swell beyond the rocks.

“I will take great care of myself,” said Mr. Gale in soothing tones. “Don’t be anxious.”

“But I am,” said Miss Etherington warmly.

“This is most gratifying,” murmured Mr. Gale.

“If you were drowned,” explained Miss Etherington, “I should probably starve; and in any case I should have to do all the cooking and washing-up myself.”

Apparently it was only an armistice.

Still, when Mr. Gale returned half-an-hour later with a boat-load of what he described as “comforts,” he found that
his companion had cleared away the breakfast and made their encampment tidy.

He made no comment, but summoned a council of two to discuss the situation. He pointed out their probable position upon the chart.

"We seem to be a long way from anywhere," said the girl dismally.

"We are," said the Job's Comforter beside her; "and what is more, we are a long way from any steamer route. Still you never know. Luckily we have a spring of water and plenty of tinned food, not to mention fish and products of the soil. We might catch a turtle, with luck, and perhaps I shall find something to shoot. Now, supposing I do the hunting and fishing and general hew-wood-and-draw-water business, will you undertake the cooking and general housekeeping?"

Miss Etherington nodded.

"We must build a little wooden hut," continued Gale, with all the enthusiasm of a small boy playing at Red Indians. "I can sleep in one half and keep the stores in the other. A sort of lean-to. We will regularly organise this island before we have done with it! I wonder, now, about clothes. What we have on won't last for ever. It's a pity your cabin was under water, or I might have salved a regular wardrobe for you. Number Seven, wasn't it?"

Miss Etherington nodded.

"By the way," she asked, "what was yours?"

"Number Three. Why?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Well, as for clothes," continued the indefatigable Mr. Gale, "if we haven't got them we must make them. Can you cut out?" he inquired sternly, regarding his companion with the austere air of a Dorcas Society secretary.

"Don't you think," interposed Miss Etherington dryly, "that you are taking rather too much thought for the morrow—not to speak of the day after to-morrow? May I make a suggestion?"

"By all means," said Mr. Gale indulgently.

"Let us go and look round for passing ships," said Miss Etherington.

The organiser, a trifle dashed, rose and meekly followed practical Eve to the summit of the rock. But there were no ships.

Mr. Leslie turned severely upon his companion.
"You see?" he said. "Twenty minutes wasted! And life is so short. Let us return and make plans."

Miss Etherington calmly followed him down again.

Still, her suggestion was not without effect. A clause was inserted in the constitution of their kingdom to the effect that Gale should climb Point Garry (as they agreed to call the headland) twice daily, at dawn and sundown, and search the horizon for passing vessels, Miss Etherington performing the same duty at other times throughout the day, during her companion's absence at the chase.

The rest of that morning was occupied with what is usually known as "settling in," a process which appears to be as inevitable to castaways in the South Pacific as to semi-detached suburbanites much nearer home. At midday Miss Etherington dished up her first meal, at which, pleasantly tired, they lay side by side upon the warm sand and conversed quite amicably. Both realized simultaneously that there is something very uniting in working to retrieve a joint disaster. With a single impulse, Mr. Gale edged a little nearer to Miss Etherington, and Miss Etherington edged a little farther away from Mr. Gale.

Thus Nature, who sets the dockleaf beside the nettle, adjusts the fine balance of sex-deportment.

When they had eaten, Leslie Gale hauled the dinghy into a shady patch of sand and proceeded to invert it over a blanket.

"What are you doing?" inquired Miss Etherington, wiping a plate.

"I propose to take a siesta," said Mr. Gale. "I have been working like a coolie since four o'clock this morning. I made two trips before you were up and I am done to the world. I advise you to retire to your cave of harmony and do likewise. We must keep ourselves fit, you know, and—and—be merry and bright. I only wish," he added awkwardly, "that you could have found yourself in more congenial company."

Then he crawled hurriedly under the dinghy's protecting shade, and rolled himself up in the blanket.

Left to her own devices, Miss Etherington, in obedience to an idea which had been obtruding itself upon her for some hours, entered the cave and inspected her cork-jacket, which lay neatly rolled up upon a ledge. Upon its outer surface, as already related, was neatly stencilled the legend, S.Y. Island Queen, R.Y.S.—State-Room No. 3.
Very slowly and reflectively Miss Etherington rolled up the jacket and put it back upon its ledge. Then, quitting the cave, she climbed up upon Point Garry and listlessly scanned the horizon.

She returned an hour later. The expression upon her features would have been ascribed by an expert in physiognomy to the workings of a guilty but unrepentant spirit.

Presently she awoke Mr. Leslie Gale, and set before him an evening meal whose excellence she did her best to discount by a display of cold aloofness which would have blighted the appetite of a less determined optimist.

V

"My hole, I think," said Mr. Gale.

"Well," remarked Miss Etherington with asperity, "if lizards are going to lie across the line of my putt on every green, I don't see how you can help winning a hole occasionally."

"These things will happen on sporting courses," said Mr. Gale sympathetically. "Still, you could have taken advantage of the by-law which says that lizards may be lifted or swept aside (but not pressed down) without penalty. Now for Point Garry! You get a stroke here. All square and one to play."

They stood upon the seventeenth green of the island golf-course. Their clubs were two home-made instruments of the hockey-stick variety, their equipment being completed by a couple of solid but well-gnawed india-rubber balls, which had been employed upon the yacht to afford recreation and exercise to the hostess's terriers. It was five o'clock in the afternoon. Supply, as represented by Mr. Gale, the purveyor, having temporarily satisfied Demand, as represented by Miss Etherington, the housekeeper, with sufficient comestibles and combustibles for the next twenty-four hours, the pair were indulging in a little exercise before proceeding from labour to refreshment.

The golf-course was an abiding joy. It had been opened with much ceremony a fortnight ago, Miss Etherington driving off the first ball from the first tee, and Mr. Gale gallantly retrieving the same from the Pacific Ocean. There were eighteen holes, ranging from five to seventy yards in length, and the course abounded in natural hazards of the most diverse description. There were no caddies, but, as Mr. Gale remarked, a caddy when you possess only one club looks ostentatious.
The golf-course is a characteristic product of British occupation of alien territory. John Bull, we all know, has a weakness for descending casually upon the unappropriated spaces of the earth, the fact that they do not strictly belong to him being, in his view, fully balanced by the fact that he causes them to prosper as they have never prospered before. If you make a desert, he argues, blossom like the rose, what does it matter whose desert it was previously? His methods of procedure seldom vary, whether he be an official man-in-possession or a younger son in search of a career. Having adjusted the local constitution to his satisfaction, he sets to work to assist the slightly flustered inhabitants to make the place pay. After that he lays out a golf-course.

There being no inhabitants upon the island, and consequently no laws to adjust, our friends had been able to get to work on the golf-course at once. Their new life had altered them surprisingly little. After three months of a semi-savage existence, so far from reverting to the service of primitive Nature, they had adapted Nature to the requirements of modern society and turned the island into a very fair imitation of a fashionable health-resort. Had they been of another caste—say, the mechanical—they would have impressed their mark in another fashion none the less indelible. There would have been water-wheels, mills, and sluices. Being of the class called leisureed, accustomed to extract as much enjoyment from life as possible and on no account ever to worry about anything, they had settled down, in one of Nature's most typical strongholds, to the nearest approach they could compass to the careless artificial life that they were accustomed to live. And so powerful are use and wont that these two unruffled Britons bade fair to expel Nature from her own stronghold. Cave man and cave woman they certainly were not yet. They were members of a class which has always been carelessly indifferent to outside influences, and does not easily change its habits or mode of speech. Consequently the island had not barbarised them. They were gently denaturalising the island.

Mr. Gale took the eighteenth hole in a perfect nine, Miss Etherington's ball over-running the green and taking refuge in a lie with which only a corkscrew could have coped. The victor having offered to the vanquished the insincere condolences usual upon such occasions, the pair sat down to enjoy the afternoon breeze.
"What is for dinner tonight?" inquired Mr. Gale.
"Turtles' eggs, fried sardines, biscuits, and bananas," replied Miss Etherington. "It's the last tin of sardines but one."
"Oh! How are the stores in general lasting out?"
"There seems to be plenty of most things. We were rather extravagant at first, but since you developed into such a mighty hunter——"
"And you into such a nailing housekeeper——"
"We have become almost self-supporting."
At this fulsome interchange of compliments the pair turned and smiled upon one another.
"And we seem to thrive on it," said Mr. Gale complacently.
"I must have gone up a stone in weight, and I feel as skittish as a young unicorn. You look pretty fit, too."

He turned and surveyed his companion. She was wearing the smart blue skirt in which she had landed on the island, sadly frayed and bleached, but still bearing the *imprimatur* of Hanover Square, together with a flannel cricket-shirt. Round her neck was knotted a coloured handkerchief. Her feet were bare. The hairpin difficulty had never been overcome, and Miss Etherington usually kept her rippling mane plaited into a convenient pigtail. That appendage having developed a habit at the end of a full swing of dealing its owner a severe buffet in the face, it was Miss Etherington's custom when playing golf to gather her locks into a heap upon the top of her head, and confine the same within a coloured headband, after the fashion of the stage brigand. Just now she was unfastening the knot of this contrivance.

Mr. Gale, discoursing at ease upon diet and hygiene, suddenly tripped in his speech, for without warning, a soft wavy cascade fell about the girl's shoulders. Through the glistening veil he could descry the droop of her lashes and the curve of her cheek. His tongue began to frame silent phrases about the tangles of Næra's hair, and his heart beat foolishly. Of late he had become increasingly conscious of this weakness—nay, vice. Common decency seemed to forbid such sentiments towards an unprotected female. But——

"Thank you," said Miss Etherington frigidly, "I am glad you think I am putting on flesh; but you need not look at me like that. This is not Smithfield Market."

Mr. Gale's attack of sentimentality passed hastily.
"Do you know," he said, "that we have been in this island for three months?"
"Have we?" replied Miss Etherington. "It seems longer," she added untruthfully.

"And I don't think," pursued Mr. Gale, "that we have made the most of our opportunities."

Miss Etherington scented danger, but could not forbear to inquire:

"In what way?"

"Well," replied Mr. Gale, "look at the things Robinson Crusoe did. He built a boat—"

"We have a boat already," remarked matter-of-fact Miss Etherington.

"Yes, that is a bit of a hardship," agreed Mr. Gale. "Then didn't he teach a parrot to talk? Couldn't we—"

"There are no parrots on this island," replied Miss Etherington gently.

"Quite true, but you haven't grasped the principle of what I am driving at. Here we are, living on a desert island, and so far we haven't done anything that two people couldn't have accomplished by going for a picnic up the Thames. I even shave. We eat food out of tins; we do a little bathing and fishing in the morning, and play golf in the afternoon, and sit about in the evening and say how jolly it must be in 'Town just now. It seems to me that we are out of the picture somehow. We ought to be a little more primitive—barbaric. Do you follow me?"

"No," said Miss Etherington. "In my opinion really nice people continue to behave just as nicely on a desert island as on a yacht."

"But don't you think," continued Mr. Gale perseveringly, "that we might train two goats to play bridge with us, or teach a turtle to sing, or something? Then we should feel that we were getting back to Nature—quite biblical, in fact. 'The voice of the turtle is heard in the land,' and so forth."

"If you are going to talk nonsense," said Miss Etherington, "I will go and get dinner ready."

"When we get away from here," continued the imaginative Mr. Gale, "we could take the little troupe with us, and earn an honest living on the music-hall stage. I once saw some performing seals at the Palace. I should think performing turtles would get quite as big a salary; and then when the public got tired of them we could sell them to the Lord Mayor for soup. That is what is known in commercial circles as a by-product."
He ran on, and Miss Etherington watched him stealthily through her lashes. A man and woman, however antipathetic, cannot consort together upon an uninhabited island for three months without gaining some insight into one another's characters and motives. Miss Etherington knew the meaning of this performance. Mr. Gale suspected her of low spirits, and was endeavouring to cheer her up. He was not doing it very well; but after all, good intentions count for something, and Miss Etherington felt grateful, despite herself. She continued to watch him furtively. He was a presentable youth. He sat beside her, healthy, clean-cut, and bronzed, wearing a ragged flannel shirt and an old pair of duck trousers. His hands were clasped about his knees; his eyes were fixed on vacancy; and his tongue wagged unceasingly. A hare-brained and occasionally bumptious young man, but a man for all that.

Suddenly Gale inquired:

"I say, what do you think of me now? Has your opinion of me altered at all, after three months of me neat?"

The next moment he repented of his inquiry. He had firmly resolved never to embarrass the girl in this fashion so long as they remained on the island together. Now he had broken his word to himself. Miss Etherington's rippling mien had been a little too much for his fortitude.

But the girl did not appear offended. She replied quite simply:

"Yes, I have. I think you have behaved very courageously in the face of all our difficulties——"

"Self-preservation is the first——" began Gale awkwardly.

"——And I have to thank you for a good deal as well," continued Miss Etherington, with slightly heightened colour.

"Besides saving my life—you did, you know: that was your life-jacket I was wearing that morning—you have behaved very courteously and honourably to me ever since we found ourselves here; and I am grateful."

This was well spoken. Mr. Gale was silent for a moment. Then he inquired:

"You did not expect such behaviour from me?"

"I—I never doubted you after the first few hours," said Miss Etherington in a low voice. "I was not quite myself then. Do you forgive me? You will, won't you?"

Their eyes met. Mr. Gale's suddenly blazed.

"When you look at me and talk to me like that," he almost
shouted, "I could—— Ahem! Ha! H'm! Quite so! My error!"

Miss Etherington's cheeks were crimson.
"I think I will go and see if there are any ships going past," he concluded lamely.
"Perhaps it would be as well," agreed Miss Etherington.
"Don't be late for dinner."
Mr. Gale turned to go, and then paused.
"You don't ask me," he remarked in a slightly injured voice, "whether my opinion of you has changed at all."
"No," replied Miss Etherington. "There is no need."
"I wonder what in thunder she meant by that," mused the harassed Mr. Gale, as he scrambled up Point Garry. "Heaven help a man left alone on a desert island with a girl! And I actually thought it would make things easier! Flint axe, and all that! Why don't I—— Hallo, hallo, hallo! Steady, my boy! Is visions about?"

He had reached the summit of the bluff. There, two miles to the northward, slipping gently over the rollers under easy sail, he beheld a ship—a three-masted schooner.

VI

For a castaway, hungering for a re-entry into civilisation, Mr. Gale's subsequent behaviour was peculiar.

He began by staring stockishly at the passing vehicle of deliverance, evidently the prey of conflicting impulses. Beside him lay a neatly piled heap of firewood, collected for such a contingency as this. His eye fell thereon. He regarded it absently, and then raised his eyes to the schooner, which went about and began to slant towards the island.

Mr. Gale, instead of shouting or semaphoring, dropped suddenly to his knees and crept furtively back whence he came, until he arrived at the edge of the little plateau, to a position which commanded their cave and encampment. Miss Etherington, from whose eyes the schooner was screened by the intervening bulk of Point Garry, was diligently preparing dinner. Mr. Gale gazed down upon her long and intently. Her sleeves were rolled up for culinary duties, and her arms looked very round and white. Snatches of a song she was singing floated upwards to his ears. Mr. Gale's pulse quickened; his purpose hardened; his conscience died within him.
"I can't do it," he muttered—"I can't!" A box of matches dropped from his nerveless fingers. . . .

Presently he crawled upon his hands and knees—he would not even risk the exposure of his figure against the skyline now—to a position from which he could see the schooner. The breeze had freshened; she had gone about again, and was bowling away from the island.

VII

An hour later they met for their evening meal. With characteristic fidelity to the customs of their order they invariably dressed for dinner—that is to say, Miss Etherington put on shoes and stockings and changed from her cricket-shirt to a silk jumper, while Mr. Gale attired himself in a suit of comparatively white drill which had once been the property of the chief steward of the yacht.

They were very silent that night. Mr. Gale's conscience was coming to life again. It was true that he loved Miss Etherington—far more, indeed, than that usually astute maiden could have gathered from the somewhat flippant and informal manner in which he had declared his passion—but this fact, urged his conscience, did not give him the sole right to her society. He had robbed her of her birthright that afternoon; he had deliberately cut her off from a return to the great world and all it held for her. He had behaved like a cad, he felt, and being an honourable young man, he was filled with a desire to make confession.

"You are not very amusing to-night," remarked Miss Etherington suddenly.

For purposes of playful badinage, there was a tacit understanding between them that everything which went wrong on the island—from cyclones to a fit of the dumps—was Leslie Gale's fault; and that long-suffering young man was growing accustomed to being treated as something between a sinful little schoolboy and a rather incompetent court jester.

"Am I to sparkle?" he inquired meekly.

"Yes."

"I don't feel quite up to it."

"Well, flicker, anyhow!" urged Miss Etherington.

Mr. Gale reflected, and replied:

"I can't do it to-night. That moon makes me humpy. Look at it! What a whopper!"
Both sat silently surveying the great silvery disc which hung above them, turning their little cove, with its yellow sand and green-clad rocks, into an etching in black and white. There was a long silence, broken by a tremendous sigh from Miss Etherington. Evidently the moon was beginning to exercise its usual pernicious influence.

"To-night's Great Thought—what is it?" inquired Mr. Gale encouragingly.

"I was thinking," said Miss Etherington dreamily, "what a good thing it would be if all the people who disliked one another for no reason at all could be dropped down together upon an island like this? a month or two."

Mr. Gale, knowing full well that a woman never embarks upon a general statement without intending it to have a personal application, carefully turned this sentiment over in his mind.

Then suddenly he glowed duskily.

"You mean," he said uneasily, "that most people improve on acquaintance?"

"Yes," said Miss Etherington deliberately—"I do."

There was a pause. Then Gale continued:

"Even—people like me?"

Miss Etherington nodded.

"Even people like you," she said. "And," she added unexpectedly, "even people like me."

Mr. Gale glanced at her, then stirred in his seat and took a mighty breath of resolution.

"You could never be improved upon by an acquaintance, however long."

Then he heaved a great sigh of relief. An Englishman does not say these things easily—that is, when he means them.

Miss Etherington subjected her companion to a fleeting but adequate scrutiny, and saw that he was once more at her mercy. But she felt no desire to wither him up—to annihilate the flank thus rashly exposed. Three months of life in the open had entirely cured her of conceit and petty meanness. Still they had not eradicated in her the natural predilection of a woman for dallying with the fish upon the hook.

"I wonder if you mean that," she remarked in a voice which, though in form severe, in substance invited further folly on the part of Mr. Gale.

"Yes, I do mean it," he replied, without heat or passion
"But I am not going to pursue the subject, because I have no right. I have just done you a serious wrong. I want to make confession."

He turned to her, like a penitent to a shrine.
"This evening," he said, "when I climbed to Point Garry on my usual excursion, I saw a ship."
Miss Etherington started, but made no further sign.
"She was quite close," continued Gale, "and I could have caught her attention by signalling. But—I didn't! I let her go! There!"
He stood motionless at her feet, awaiting sentence.
Miss Etherington raised her clear grey eyes to his.
"Why did you let the ship go?" she asked.
"Because I love you so," said Gale simply. "I could not bear to be parted from you, as I knew I should be. It seemed too cruel to bring this life to an end, just as—"
"Just as what?" asked the girl quickly.
"Just as you were beginning to get used to—it," concluded Leslie Gale, coward.
Miss Etherington was silent for a little time. Then she said:
"You made no attempt to signal?"
"None."
"Concealed yourself, perhaps?"
Gale nodded miserably, and waited.
Miss Etherington dropped her eyes again, and began to scrutinise the tips of her shoes.
"I wouldn't worry about it too much if I were you," she said.
"Why?"
"I saw the ship too," said the girl demurely.

VIII

They sat on in the moonlight—and on, and on, and on. About half-past ten Mr. Gale had respectfully but firmly taken Miss Etherington's hand. Miss Etherington had made a half-hearted attempt to withdraw it. Mr. Gale had apologetically but pertinaciously held on. After that they began to talk, and although they had not been out of one another's company for the best part of three months, not one of the many topics with which they had whiled away that lengthy period intruded itself into the conversation. They seemed to
have turned over a new page in the book of life together. Under their eyes it lay, fair, blank, and gleaming with blessed possibilities beneath the rays of a tropical moon. And for the moment they were well content to leave it so. Let to-morrow, with its prosaic meticulous pen and inkhorn, stand far off and wait! There would never be another hour like this.

At last Miss Etherington rose.

"I am sleepy," she said. "Let me go now."

Gale held her to him for a moment longer, caressing her loosely-knotted shimmering hair.

"Phyllis!" he murmured reverently, and raised his face skyward, as if to give thanks. From the neighbourhood of his right shoulder there arose a muffled observation. For a moment he failed to take note of it, for he was gaping dumbly over Miss Etherington’s head at the moonlit waters of their bay. Miss Etherington accordingly spoke again.

"I wish," she murmured—"I wish there were a lot of people to tell."

"To tell what? That we are"—he coughed nervously—"engaged?"

"Yes. Engaged sounds queer on a desert island, doesn’t it? But when a girl gets engaged she wants to tell everybody."

"That’s strange. When I get engaged I feel that the secret is too precious to pass on to anybody. It’s mine! mine! Ours! ours! ‘Ours’—how wonderful that sounds after years of just ‘mine.’ But"—he brought his gaze back seaward again—"do you really want a crowd of people to tell your news to?"

"Yes, please," said Miss Etherington meekly.

"Well, shut your eyes, and don’t open them until I tell you."

Miss Etherington obeyed. Mr. Gale rotated her carefully until she faced the calm, glittering ocean.

"Abracadabra! Likewise what ho! Open your eyes!" he commanded.

Miss Etherington obeyed. There before her in the moonlight, half-a-mile from the shore, like a misty sea-wraith, floated a great white yacht, drifting to an anchorage. Even as they gazed there was a luminous splash, and the cable rattled out.
IX

They were taken home next day on board the *Morning Star*, brought out to search for them by their host and the other survivors of the wreck.

For many years Mr. Leslie Gale never ceased to bless the three-masted schooner whose passing had been fraught with such uniting consequences. In fact he exalted that nameless vessel into a fetish, ascribing to it match-making properties bordering upon the supernatural. It was Mrs. Gale who pricked the bubble.

"I wonder, dearest," observed her husband one day, "if you would have ever found out that you really cared for me if you hadn't seen that old hooker go sailing by—what?"

"I wonder," said Mrs. Gale patiently.

"It was lucky," continued the fatuous Leslie, "that no ship turned up earlier on, before you had acquired a taste for me, so to speak. That would have put me in the cart, wouldn't it?"

"Would it?"

"Yes. Supposing that it had happened sooner? Supposing, for instance, that after we had been together for a matter of a few hours, instead of a few months, you had climbed Point Garry and seen a ship go sailing by? What then?"

Mrs. Gale arose, and began to put away her work.

"I did," she said briefly.
THE LADY OF THE BARGE

The master of the barge Arabella sat in the stern of his craft with his right arm leaning on the tiller. A desultory conversation with the mate of a schooner, who was hanging over the side of his craft a few yards off, had come to a conclusion owing to a difference of opinion on the subject of religion. The skipper had argued so warmly that he almost fancied he must have inherited the tenets of the Seventh-day Baptists from his mother, while the mate had surprised himself by the warmth of his advocacy of a form of Wesleyanism which would have made the members of that sect open their eyes with horror. He had, moreover, confirmed the skipper in the error of his ways by calling him a bargee, the ranks of the Baptists receiving a defender if not a recruit from that hour.

With the influence of the religious argument still upon him, the skipper, as the long summer's day gave place to night, fell to wondering where his own mate, who was also his brother-in-law, had got to. Lights which had been struggling with the twilight now burnt bright and strong, and the skipper, moving from the shadow to where a band of light fell across the deck, took out a worn silver watch and saw that it was ten o'clock.

Almost at the same moment a dark figure appeared on the jetty above and began to descend the ladder, and a strongly built young man of twenty-two sprang nimbly to the deck.

"Ten o'clock, Ted," said the skipper slowly.

"It'll be eleven in an hour's time," said the mate calmly.

"That'll do," said the skipper, in a somewhat loud voice, as he noticed that his late adversary still occupied his favourite strained position, and a fortuitous expression of his mother's
occurred to him: "Don’t talk to me; I’ve been arguing with a son of Belial for the last half-hour."

"Bargee," said the son of Belial, in a dispassionate voice.

"Don’t take no notice of him, Ted," said the skipper pityingly.

"He wasn’t talking to me," said Ted. "But never mind about him; I want to speak to you in private."

"Fire away, my lad," said the other, in a patronising voice.

"Speak up," said the voice from the schooner encouragingly. "I’m listening."

There was no reply from the bargee. The master led the way to the cabin, and lighting a lamp, which appealed to more senses than one, took a seat on a locker, and again requested the other to fire away.

"Well, you see, it’s this way," began the mate, with a preliminary wriggle; "there’s a certain young woman——"

"A certain young what?" shouted the master of the Arabella.

"Woman," repeated the mate snappishly; "you’ve heard of a woman afore, haven’t you? Well, there’s a certain young woman I’m walking out with I——"

"Walking out?" gasped the skipper. "Why, I never ’eard o’ such a thing."

"You would ha’ done if you’d been better looking, p’raps," retorted the other. "Well, I’ve offered this young woman to come for a trip with us."

"Oh, you have, ‘ave you!" said the skipper sharply.

"And what do you think Louisa will say to it?"

"That’s your look out," said Louisa’s brother cheerfully.

"I’ll make her up a bed for’ard, and we’ll all be as happy as you please."

He started suddenly. The mate of the schooner was indulging in a series of whistles of the most amatory description.

"There she is," he said. "I told her to wait outside."

He ran upon deck, and his perturbed brother-in-law, following at his leisure, was just in time to see him descending the ladder with a young woman and a small handbag.

"This is my brother-in-law, Cap’n Gibbs," said Ted, introducing the new arrival; "smartest man at a barge on the river."

The girl extended a neatly gloved hand, shook the skipper’s affably, and looked wonderingly about her.

"It’s very close to the water, Ted," she said dubiously.
The skipper coughed. "We don't take passengers as a rule," he said awkwardly: "we 'ain't got much convenience for them."

"Never mind," said the girl kindly: "I shan't expect too much."

She turned away, and following the mate down to the cabin, went into ecstasies over the space-saving contrivances she found there. The drawers fitted in the skipper's bunk were a source of particular interest, and the owner watched with strong disapprobation through the skylight her efforts to make him an apple-pie bed with the limited means at her disposal. He went down below at once as a wet blanket.

"I was just shaking your bed up a bit," said Miss Harris, reddening.

"I see you was," said the skipper briefly.

He tried to pluck up courage to tell her that he couldn't take her, but only succeeded in giving vent to an inhospitable cough.

"I'll get the supper," said the mate suddenly; "you sit down, old man, and talk to Lucy."

In honour of the visitor he spread a small cloth, and then proceeded to produce cold beef, pickles, and accessories in a manner which reminded Miss Harris of white rabbits from a conjuror's hat. Captain Gibbs, accepting the inevitable, ate his supper in silence and left them to their glances.

"We must make you up a bed, for'ard, Lucy," said the mate, when they had finished.

Miss Harris started. "Where's that?" she inquired.

"Other end o' the boat," replied the mate, gathering up some bedding under his arm. "You might bring a lantern, John."

The skipper, who was feeling more sociable after a couple of glasses of beer, complied, and accompanied the couple to the tiny forecastle. A smell compounded of bilge, tar, paint, and other healthy disinfectants emerged as the scuttle was pushed back. The skipper dangled the lantern down and almost smiled.

"I can't sleep there," said the girl, with decision. "I shall die o' fright."

"You'll get used to it," said Ted encouragingly, as he helped her down; "it's quite dry and comfortable."

He put his arm round her waist and squeezed her hand, and aided by this moral support, Miss Harris not only con-
sented to remain, but found various advantages in the forecastle over the cabin, which had escaped the notice of previous voyagers.

"I'll leave you the lantern," said the mate, making it fast, "and we shall be on deck most o' the night. We get under way at two."

He quitted the forecastle, followed by the skipper, after a polite but futile attempt to give him precedence, and made his way to the cabin for two or three hours' sleep.

"There'll be a row at the other end, Ted," said the skipper nervously, as he got into his bunk. "Louisa's sure to blame me for letting you keep company with a gal like this. We was talking about you only the other day, and she said if you was married five years from now, it 'ud be quite soon enough."

"Let Lou mind her own business," said the mate sharply; "she's not going to nag me. She's not my wife, thank goodness!"

He turned over and fell fast asleep, waking up fresh and bright three hours later, to commence what he fondly thought would be the pleasantest voyage of his life.

The Arabella dropped slowly down with the tide, the wind being so light that she was becalmed by every tall warehouse on the way. Off Greenwich, however, the breeze freshened somewhat, and a little later Miss Harris, looking somewhat pale as to complexion and untidy as to hair, came slowly on deck.

"Where's the looking-glass?" she asked, as Ted hastened to greet her. "How does my hair look?"

"All wavy," said the infatuated young man; "all little curls and squiggles. Come down in the cabin; there's a glass there."

Miss Harris, with a light nod to the skipper as he sat at the tiller, followed the mate below, and giving vent to a little cry of indignation as she saw herself in the glass, waved the amorous Ted on deck, and started work on her disarranged hair.

At breakfast-time a little friction was caused by what the mate bitterly termed the narrow-minded, old-fashioned ways of the skipper. He had arranged that the skipper should steer while he and Miss Harris breakfasted, but the coffee was no sooner on the table than the skipper called him, and relinquishing the helm in his favour, went below to do the honours. The mate protested.
"It's not proper," said the skipper. "Me and 'er will 'ave our meals together, and then you must have yours. She's under my care."

Miss Harris assented blithely, and talk and laughter greeted the ears of the ignoble mate as he steered. He went down at last to cold coffee and lukewarm herrings, returning to the deck after a hurried meal to find the skipper narrating some of his choicest experiences to an audience which hung on his lightest word.

The disregard they showed for his feelings was maddening, and for the first time in his life he became a prey to jealousy in its worst form. It was quite clear to him that the girl had become desperately enamored of the skipper, and he racked his brain in a wild effort to discover the reason.

With an idea of reminding his brother-in-law of his position, he alluded two or three times in a casual fashion to his wife. The skipper hardly listened to him, and patting Miss Harris's cheek in a fatherly manner, regaled her with an anecdote of the mate's boyhood which the latter had spent a goodly portion of his life in denying. He denied it again hotly, and Miss Harris, conquering for a time her laughter, reprimanded him severely for contradicting.

By the time dinner was ready he was in a state of sullen apathy, and when the meal was over and the couple came on deck again, so far forgot himself as to compliment Miss Harris upon her appetite.

"I'm ashamed of you, Ted," said the skipper, with severity.
"I'm glad you know what shame is," retorted the mate.
"If you can't be'ave yourself, you'd better keep a bit for'ard till you get in a better temper," continued the skipper.
"I'll be pleased to," said the smarting mate. "I wish the barge was longer."
"It couldn't be too long for me," said Miss Harris, tossing her head.
"Be'aving like a schoolboy," murmured the skipper.
"I know how to behave my-self," said the mate, as he disappeared below. His head suddenly appeared again over the companion. "If some people don't," he added, and disappeared again.

He was pleased to notice as he ate his dinner that the giddy prattle above had ceased, and with his back turned toward the couple when he appeared on deck again, he lounged slowly forward until the skipper called him back again.
"Wot was them words you said just now, Ted?" he inquired.

The mate repeated them with gusto.

"Very good," said the skipper sharply; "very good."

"Don't you ever speak to me again," said Miss Harris, with a stately air, "because I won't answer you if you do."

The mate displayed more of his schoolboy nature. "Wait till you're spoken to," he said rudely. "This is your gratefulness, I suppose?"

"Gratefulness?" said Miss Harris, with her chin in the air. "What for?"

"For bringing you for a trip," replied the mate sternly.

"You bringing me for a trip!" said Miss Harris scornfully. "Captain Gibbs is the master here, I suppose. He is giving me the trip. You're only the mate."

"Just so," said the mate, with a grin at his brother-in-law, which made that worthy shift uneasily. "I wonder what Loo will say when she sees you with a lady aboard?"

"She came to please you," said Captain Gibbs, with haste.

"Ho! she did, did she?" jeered the mate. "Prove it; only don't look to me to back you, that's all."

The other eyed him in consternation, and his manner changed.

"Don't play the fool, Ted," he said, not unkindly; "you know what Loo is."

"Well, I'm reckoning on that," said the mate deliberately. "I'm going for'ard; don't let me interrupt you two. So long."

He went slowly forward, and lighting his pipe, sprawled carelessly on the deck, and renounced the entire sex forthwith.

At tea-time the skipper attempted to reverse the procedure at the other meals; but as Miss Harris steadfastly declined to sit at the same table as the mate, his good intentions came to naught.

He made an appeal to what he termed the mate's better nature, after Miss Harris had retired to the seclusion of her bed-chamber, but in vain.

"She's nothing to do with me," declared the mate majestically. "I wash my hands of her. She's a flirt. I'm like Louisa, I can't bear flirts."

The skipper said no more, but his face was so worn that Miss Harris, when she came on deck in the early morning and found the barge gliding gently between the grassy banks of a
river, attributed it to the difficulty of navigating so large a
craft on so small and winding a stream.
"We shall be alongside in 'arf an hour," said the skipper, 
eyeing her.
Miss Harris expressed her gratification.
"P'raps you wouldn't mind going down the fo'c'sle and 
staying there till we've made fast," said the other. "I'd take 
it as a favour. My owners don't like me to carry passengers."
Miss Harris, who understood perfectly, said, "Certainly," 
and with a cold stare at the mate, who was at no pains to 
conceal his amusement, went below at once, thoughtfully 
closing the scuttle after her.
"There's no call to make mischief, Ted," said the skipper, 
somewhat anxiously, as they swept round the last bend and 
came into view of Coalsham.
The mate said nothing, but stood by to take in sail as they 
ran swiftly toward the little quay. The pace slackened, and 
the Arabella, as though conscious of the contraband in her fore-
castle, crept slowly to where a stout, middle-aged woman, who 
bore a strong likeness to the mate, stood upon the quay.
"There's poor Loo," said the mate, with a sigh.
The skipper made no reply to this infernal insinuation.
The barge ran alongside the quay and made fast.
"I thought you'd be up," said Mrs. Gibbs to her husband. 
"Now come along to breakfast; Ted'll follow on."
Captain Gibbs dived down below for his coat, and slipping 
ashore, thankfully prepared to move off with his wife.
"Come on as soon as you can, Ted," said the latter. "Why, 
what on earth is he making that face for?"
She turned in amazement as her brother, making a pretense 
of catching her husband's eye, screwed his face up into a note 
of interrogation and gave a slight jerk with his thumb.
"Come along," said Captain Gibbs, taking her arm with 
much affection.
"But what's Ted looking like that for?" demanded his 
wife, as she easily intercepted another choice facial expression 
of the mate's.
"Oh, it's his fun," replied her husband, walking on.
"Fun?" repeated Mrs. Gibbs sharply. "What's the 
matter, Ted?"
"Nothing," replied the mate.
"Touch o' toothache," said the skipper. "Come along, 
Loo; I can just do with one o' your breakfasts."
Mrs. Gibbs suffered herself to be led on, and had got at least five yards on the way home, when she turned and looked back. The mate had still got the toothache, and was at that moment in all the agonies of a phenomenal twinge.

"There's something wrong here," said Mrs. Gibbs as she retraced her steps. "Ted, what are you making that face for?"

"It's my own face," said the mate evasively.

Mrs. Gibbs conceded the point, and added bitterly that it couldn't be helped. All the same she wanted to know what he meant by it.

"Ask John," said the vindictive mate.

Mrs. Gibbs asked. Her husband said he didn't know, and added that Ted had been like it before, but he had not told her for fear of frightening her. Then he tried to induce her to go with him to the chemist's to get something for it.

Mrs. Gibbs shook her head firmly, and boarding the barge, took a seat on the hatch and proceeded to catechise her brother as to his symptoms. He denied that there was anything the matter with him, while his eyes openly sought those of Captain Gibbs as though asking for instruction.

"You come home, Ted," she said at length.

"I can't," said the mate. "I can't leave the ship."

"Why not?" demanded his sister.

"Ask John," said the mate again.

At this Mrs. Gibbs's temper, which had been rising, gave way altogether, and she stamped fiercely upon the deck. A stamp of the foot has been for all time a rough-and-ready means of signalling; the fore-scuttle was drawn back, and the face of a young and pretty girl appeared framed in the opening. The mate raised his eyebrows with a helpless gesture, and as for the unfortunate skipper, any jury would have found him guilty without leaving the box. The wife of his bosom, with a flaming visage, turned and regarded him.

"You villain!" she said, in a choking voice.

Captain Gibbs caught his breath and looked appealingly at the mate.

"It's a little surprise for you, my dear," he faltered; "it's Ted's young lady."

"Nothing of the kind," said the mate sharply.

"It's not? How dare you say such a thing?" demanded Miss Harris, stepping on to the deck.

"Well, you brought her aboard, Ted; you know you did," pleaded the unhappy skipper.
The mate did not deny it, but his face was so full of grief and surprise that the other's heart sank within him.

"All right," said the mate at last; "have it your own way."

"Hold your tongue, Ted," shouted Mrs. Gibbs; "you're trying to shield him."

"I tell you Ted brought her aboard, and they had a lovers' quarrel," said her unhappy spouse. "It's nothing to do with me at all."

"And that's why you told me Ted had got the toothache, and tried to get me off to the chemist's, I s'pose," retorted his wife, with virulence. "Do you think I'm a fool? How dare you ask a young woman on this barge? How dare you?"

"I didn't ask her," said her husband.

"I s'pose she came without being asked," sneered his wife, turning her regards to the passenger; "she looks the sort that might. You brazen-faced girl!"

"Here, go easy, Loo," interrupted the mate, flushing as he saw the girl's pale face.

"Mind your own business," said his sister violently.

"It is my business," said the repentant mate. "I brought her aboard, and then we quarrelled."

"I've no doubt," said his sister bitterly; "it's very pretty, but it won't do."

"I swear it's the truth," said the mate.

"Why did John keep it so quiet and hide her for, then?" demanded his sister.

"I came down for the trip," said Miss Harris; "that is all about it. There is nothing to make a fuss about. How much is it, Captain Gibbs?"

She produced a little purse from her pocket, but before the embarrassed skipper could reply, his infuriated wife struck it out of her hand. The mate sprang instinctively forward, but too late, and the purse fell with a splash into the water. The girl gave a faint cry and clasped her hands.

"How am I to get back?" she gasped.

"I'll see to that, Lucy," said the mate. "I'm very sorry—I've been a brute."

"You?" said the indignant girl. "I would sooner drown myself than be beholden to you."

"I'm very sorry," repeated the mate humbly.

"There's enough of this play-acting," interposed Mrs. Gibbs. "Get off this barge."
"You stay where you are," said the mate authoritatively.
"Send that girl off this barge," screamed Mrs. Gibbs to her husband.
Captain Gibbs smiled in a silly fashion and scratched his head. "Where is she to go?" he asked feebly.
"What does it matter to you where she goes?" cried his wife fiercely. "Send her off."
The girl eyed her haughtily, and repulsing the mate as he strove to detain her, stepped to the side. Then she paused as he suddenly threw off his coat, and sitting down on the hatch, hastily removed his boots. The skipper, divining his intentions, seized him by the arm.
"Don't be a fool, Ted," he gasped; "you'll get under the barge."
The mate shook him off, and went in with a splash which half drowned his adviser. Miss Harris, clasping her hands, ran to the side and gazed fearfully at the spot where he had disappeared, while his sister in a terrible voice seized the opportunity to point out to her husband the probably fatal results of his ill-doing. There was an anxious interval, and then the mate's head appeared above the water, and after a breathing-space, disappeared again. The skipper, watching uneasily, stood by with a life-belt.
"Come out, Ted," screamed his sister as he came up for breath again.
The mate disappeared once more, but coming up for the third time, hung on to the side of the barge to recover a bit. A clothed man in the water savours of disaster and looks alarming. Miss Harris began to cry.
"You'll be drowned," she whimpered.
"Come out," said Mrs. Gibbs, in a raspy voice. She knelt on the deck and twined her fingers in his hair. The mate addressed her in terms rendered brotherly by pain.
"Never mind about the purse," sobbed Miss Harris; "it doesn't matter."
"Will you make it up if I come out, then?" demanded the diver.
"No; I'll never speak to you again as long as I live," said the girl passionately.
The mate disappeared again. This time he was out of sight longer than usual, and when he came up merely tossed his arms weakly and went down again. There was a scream from the women, and a mighty splash as the skipper went
The mate shook him off and went in with a splash.
overboard with a life-belt. The mate's head, black and shining, showed for a moment; the skipper grabbed him by the hair and towed him to the barge's side, and in the midst of a considerable hubbub both men were drawn from the water.

The skipper shook himself like a dog, but the mate lay on the deck inert in a puddle of water. Mrs. Gibbs frantically slapped his hands; and Miss Harris, bending over him, rendered first aid by kissing him wildly.

Captain Gibbs pushed her away. "He won't come round while you're a-kissing of him," he cried roughly.

To his indignant surprise the drowned man opened one eye and winked acquiescence. The skipper dropped his arms by his side and stared at him stupidly.

"I saw his eyelid twitch," cried Mrs. Gibbs joyfully.

"He's all right," said her indignant husband; "'e ain't born to be drowned, 'e ain't. I've spoilt a good suit of clothes for nothing."

To his wife's amazement, he actually walked away from the insensible man, and with a boat-hook reached for his hat, which was floating by. Mrs. Gibbs, still gazing in blank astonishment, caught a seraphic smile on the face of her brother as Miss Harris continued her ministrations, and in a pardonable fit of temper the overwrought woman gave him a box on the ear, which brought him round at once.

"Where am I?" he inquired artlessly.

Mrs. Gibbs told him. She also told him her opinion of him, and without plagiarising her husband's words, came to the same conclusion as to his ultimate fate.

"You come along home with me," she said, turning in a friendly fashion to the bewildered girl. "They deserve what they've got—both of 'em. I only hope that they'll both get such awful colds that they won't find their voices for a twelve-month."

She took the girl by the arm and helped her ashore. They turned their heads once in the direction of the barge, and saw the justly incensed skipper keeping the mate's explanations and apologies at bay with a boat-hook. Then they went in to breakfast.
THE BINDLES AT THE ZOO

I

"You can get your own tea on Sunday," announced Mrs. Bindle, as she banged upon the table a yellow pie-dish containing Irish stew.

"Get my own tea?" queried Bindle, looking up from the newspaper he had been surreptitiously reading, newspapers not being popular with Mrs. Bindle at meal-times. "Why should I get my own tea on Sunday, Mrs. B.?"

"Because I'm going out, that's why," she retorted. "I suppose you'd like me to give up all my pleasures as well as wait on you hand and foot."

"Where you going, Lizzie?" he enquired pacifically. He hated storms before meat—they always affected the size of Mrs. Bindle's "helpings."

"I'm going to the Zoo."

"To live?"

A moment later he cursed himself for his glib tongue. The nice meaty chop that Mrs. Bindle had in the spoon was dropped back into the dish, and a piece of unattractive scrag selected in its place.

"Mr. Hearty has invited me to go with him."

For the next few minutes Bindle occupied himself in trying to find some vulnerable spot for his knife and fork in the piece of scrag that lay on his plate.

"He's had some tickets given him. It's a private day on Sunday," announced Mrs. Bindle presently, determined to get the full flavour out of the episode.

"Better put this 'ere piece of bone in your pocket for the
lions in case they 'aven't got enough,” he said gloomily, turning
over the bit of scrag and examining it from the underside.

“ That's right, complain about your food. Pity you
haven't got something else to grumble about ”—Mrs. Bindle
was out for blood. “ It's grumble, grumble, grumble, morning,
noon, and night. Nothing ever satisfies you, and meat the
price it is.”

“ Can't I have somethink with a bit o' meat on it, then? ”
he complained, still making valiant efforts to dissect that which
nature had never intended should be dissected.

“ There, look at you now! ”

In his struggle, Bindle had approached too near the edge
of the plate, with the result that it had suddenly tilted towards
him, depositing its contents upon his knees.

“ You're not fit to eat with pigs,” was Mrs. Bindle's com-
ment, as she watched Bindle scrape from his clothes and pick
up from the floor what remained of his meal, using a spoon for
the purpose. This done, he pushed his plate towards her;
but Mrs. Bindle ignored the hint.

“ Give us a bit more, Lizzie,” he pleaded.

“ There isn't any more,” she announced with decision.

“ No more! ” he echoed in consternation. “ But there's a
lot in the dish.”

“ That's got to do for to-morrow. You seem to forget the
price of things. In future you'd better take your meals in the
scullery, then you can slop your food about as you like.”

“ But I ain't 'ad anythink to eat yet,” he grumbled.

Mrs. Bindle ignored the protest, but compromised a delicate
situation by dabbing on his plate two potatoes, some gravy,
and a small piece of meat.

Another time the news that Mrs. Bindle and Mr. Hearty
were going to the Zoo would have filled Bindle with unholy
joy; but it is a humorous head that laughs on an empty
stomach. When he left No. 7 Fenton Street to return to his
work, it was with a sense of grievance that somehow seemed to
involve his brother-in-law, Mr. Hearty, and the Zoo itself.

All the afternoon he brooded over the wrong that had been
done him, inspired to discontent by the feeling of emptiness
within.

That evening, when he left work, he took a bus to Chelsea
to call on his friend, Dr. Richard Little, whom he found at
home. When, half an hour later, he left the surgery, it was
with a lighter heart and a brighter outlook. Dr. Little had
promised to obtain from a friend tickets for the Zoological Gardens which could be used on the following Sunday. Bindle’s plaintive remark that “Some’ow it doesn’t seem right to miss seein’ Mrs. B. and ’Early in the monkey ’ouse” had proved irresistible.

On the following Sunday the Bindles dined early. One o’clock saw Mrs. Bindle’s kitchen spotless, with not a thing awry, and tea laid for one. Mrs. Bindle herself stood at the door taking a final look round to see that everything was as it should be.

“You’ll find tea in the cup. Mind you hot the pot first and see the water’s boiling, then let it stand for three minutes.”

She was arrayed in her best alpaca and her most biscuit-coloured gloves, tight across the palms to the point of discomfort. Her bonnet of purple, “picked out with spring-leaf green,” sat perpendicularly upon her head, and the purple ribbons were tied with meticulous neatness beneath her sharp chin.

From her elastic-sided boots, with patent-leather toe-caps, to the top of her rather forbidding headgear, she was conscious that there was nothing amiss. In Bindle’s idiom, she felt herself to be “It.”

“And mind you don’t spill your tea on the cloth,” she said as she turned towards the door, “and when you’ve finished put your cup and saucer and plate in the pan in the sink.”

“You’re wastin’ a lot o’ breath, Mrs. B.,” said Bindle at length. “I ain’t a-goin’ to be ’ome to tea.”

“Then why couldn’t you say so before, and save me laying it?”

Bindle had postponed the announcement until the last moment. He had intended telling Mrs. Bindle that he also was bound for the Zoo; but just as the words were on his lips he realised that a more dramatic effect might be obtained by presenting himself to his wife and brother-in-law as they were indulging in their pleasures.

Five minutes later the front door banged, and Mrs. Bindle was on her way to Putney Bridge Station, to meet her brother-in-law.

II

“I think,” remarked Mr. Hearty, with the air of one who has given the matter mature consideration, “I think, Elizabeth, that we ought to see the lions fed.”
"I should like it, Mr. Hearty," said Mrs. Bindle, drawing in her chin, which, when with Mr. Hearty, was always a sign that she was pleased. "I have never seen the lions fed," she added, as one announcing that she had never tasted artichokes.

"Can you tell me what time the lions are fed?" enquired Mr. Hearty politely, as they passed through the turnstiles.

"Four o'clock," replied the man, in the tone of one who suffers fools professionally.

"We must see the Mappin Terraces also," announced Mr. Hearty, springing open the case of his gold hunter. Mr. Hearty never lost an opportunity of acquainting himself with the time.

"I should like to," said Mrs. Bindle, utterly at sea as to what a Mappin terrace might be; but prepared to see every animal known to Noah.

For nearly half an hour they proceeded to stroll about, aimless and uncertain, Mr. Hearty generally half a yard in front. He realised that care was necessary in a place like the Zoo. He had already determined to do all he could to head Mrs. Bindle off from the Monkey House.

Mr. Hearty was never at home in the Monkey House. There was a certain realistic freedom adopted by monkeys which he found disconcerting.

Suddenly his eye caught sight of the words "Cat House." Recalling a previous visit to the Zoo, he piloted Mrs. Bindle past the entrance.

"Phew! What a stink!"

As the words assailed his ears Mr. Hearty shuddered. A moment later, his head jerked forward, as a flat and hearty hand caught him full between the shoulders.

"So I caught you, 'ave I?"

Mr. Hearty turned to find himself blinking uncertainly into the eyes of Bindle behind a large cigar with a red and gold band. In the background stood Ginger, a gloomy picture of pimpled misanthropy, emphasised by a Cambridge-blue tie. Ginger's complexion had never been schemed for delicate tints in neck-wear.

Mrs. Bindle glared at Ginger, then, as if dazzled by his tie, she transferred her eyes to Bindle.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded.

"Jest a-toddlin' round sayin' 'ow-je,do to the snakes," was the response. "Been to see the old toms?" he enquired pleasantly of Mr. Hearty, who shuddered at the question.
"Blinkin’ stink!" was Ginger’s comment. "I’d poison ’em," he added malevolently. "Don’t ‘old wiv cats!"

"Come along, ’Earty," said Bindle, linking his arm in that of his reluctant brother-in-law. "Funny thing seein’ you ’ere. Dr. Little give me two tickets, so I brought ole Ging. The Zoo always cheers ’im up, don’t it, Ging?" he threw over his shoulder, at which Ginger growled a remark about not holding with something or other.

During the short conversation Mrs. Bindle had stood with indrawn lips. She saw in Bindle’s sudden appearance with the unspeakable Ginger, whom she detested, another organised attempt to humiliate her.

As Bindle led Mr. Hearty away, she had perforce to follow with Ginger, who, conversationally, was an undischarged bankrupt. This, coupled with his openly expressed hatred of women, rendered him a questionable cavalier.

"Nothin’ but one stink after another," he grumbled.

Mrs. Bindle stiffened. In her own mind she was preparing things she intended to say to Bindle when a suitable occasion presented itself.

"’Ere, Ging, come an’ look at this," cried Bindle, who had pulled up in front of a cage in which sat, with embarrassing frankness and composure, a mandrill.

Mrs. Bindle suddenly became conscious that Mr. Hearty had turned and was walking hurriedly away.

"Did jer ever see anythink like it?" demanded Bindle of Ginger. "Looks as if ’e’d——"

"Bindle!"

Mrs. Bindle’s lips had entirely disappeared. A moment later she too turned and walked swiftly away in the direction taken by Mr. Hearty. Ginger leant forward, one hand on either knee, examining with an interest that surprised Bindle the eccentrically marked mandrill.

"Wot jer think of ’im, Ging?"

"Funny old blinker!" muttered Ginger presently. "Fancy ’avin’ to go about wiv a——"

"’Ush, Ging! Remember it’s Sunday," and Bindle drew his reluctant friend away from the mandrill’s cage.

"Fancy a-paintin’ of ’im up like that," persisted Ginger. "Funny place to——"

"’Ush, Ging!" murmured Bindle.

"’Oo’s ’e?" demanded Ginger, as he and Bindle proceeded to overtake Mr. Hearty, who had waited for Mrs.
Bindles at the Zoo

Bindles. "'E ain't 'alf got the blinkin' 'eart bowed down," he added.

*Bindles explained the relationship.*

"'Ullo, they're going to see the elephants," he said, as Mrs. Bindle and Mr. Hearty disappeared into the elephant shed.

Upon Mr. Hearty's features as he entered was the expression of a man who finds the atmosphere distasteful. He possessed an extremely delicate sense of smell.

Taking her cue from her brother-in-law, Mrs. Bindle drew a handkerchief from her pocket and held it to her nose.

"I likes the smell of elephants," announced Bindle, with the air of one announcing that heliotrope or mignonette is a delight to his nostrils.

"I don't 'old wiv elephants," grumbled Ginger, as he gazed at the waving trunk of the elephant before which they were standing.

"Get away, you brute!"

Mrs. Bindle brought her umbrella down with a vigorous smack on the side of the trunk, which the elephant, anticipating hospitality, had thrust towards her, opening and closing the viscid extremity invitingly.

A moment later Mrs. Bindle started back with a scream, dropping her umbrella. The elephant, resenting the assault, had blown deliberately in her face, with the result that to Mrs. Bindle's features clung much elephantine moisture.

Mr. Hearty turned and made for the door, while Ginger laughed.

So astonished was Bindle at the sight of Ginger laughing that he forgot Mrs. Bindle in the contemplation of what was, so far as his experience went, a record.

"Blinkin' old 'Un, spittin' like that," said Ginger, and he laughed again. Ginger had spent six months in a German prison.

A keeper strolled up and proceeded to soothe the irate pachyderm.

With fingers that trembled with anger, Mrs. Bindle proceeded to remove her veil and then to wipe her face. This done, she turned upon the keeper.

"I shall report you," she announced, "for—for not putting that brute in a cage."

"He's harmless enough, mum," was the keeper's cool retort; "but he don't like being hit. It's a wonder he didn't
lift you up and dash you against the roof,” he added, drawing upon his imagination.

Mrs. Bindle retreated a pace, realising that she was still within reach of that tenuous menace.

Mr. Hearty had disappeared, and a moment later Mrs. Bindle followed, while Bindle and Ginger brought up the rear.

“'I'll report that man!'” announced Mrs. Bindle to Mr. Hearty as she continued to rub her face; it still felt contracted, due to the elephant's stickiness.

“They ought not to allow such brutes loose,” said Mr. Hearty with conviction. He had already made up his mind to approach nothing that was not behind iron bars. He almost regretted his suggestion that they should see the lions fed.

“It's ten minutes to four, 'Early,'” cried Bindle from behind. “'We'd better go and see 'em feed the lions.'"

The lions did not appear to be hungry; they accepted their joints with a callousness that disappointed both Bindle and Ginger, who had hoped for “a bit of a scrap.”

Mrs. Bindle expressed her views upon the quality of the meat supplied, the arrival of which Bindle had heralded with: “Oh, lor, don't it niff?"

The zoological interests of Mrs. Bindle and Ginger were as poles asunder. The exhibits which interested Ginger aroused in Mrs. Bindle a feeling of repulsion. Their first differences of opinion arose in regard to the kangaroos.

Ginger was not overburdened with zoological knowledge; but one thing he did know, and that was the way in which certain marsupials, notably the kangaroo, carry their young. With Ginger, to know a thing was to impart the knowledge to others. In general he was a man upon whose lips had fallen a great silence.

From the first he had been anxious to discover the whereabouts of the kangaroos. When at last he found them, Ginger gave a little grunt of satisfaction.

“Look!” he said, seizing Mrs. Bindle by the arm and pointing to a lady kangaroo. “See, that's where it carries——”

For answer, Mrs. Bindle gripped her umbrella and brought its knob in sharp contact with Ginger’s chin.

“'Ere, wot the blinkin’——!” he shouted.

“Steady, Ginger,” grinned Bindle, “this ain’t a bloomin’ Cabinet Meetin’.”

“Wot she want to biff me wiv 'er umbrella for?” he demanded angrily.
“If you give me any more of your lewd talk I’ll do it again,” announced Mrs. Bindle, pale with anger.

“I only said——” began Ginger.

“Stop it!” cried Mrs. Bindle, raising the umbrella, and Ginger stopped it.

Mrs. Bindle walked on with Mr. Hearty. For her, kangaroos were irretrievably and forever banned as disgusting beasts.

Ginger stayed behind to explain to Bindle the nursery accommodation provided by nature for juvenile kangaroos.

Another crisis arose owing to a heated discussion between Bindle and Ginger about a zoological matter connected with a white-bearded gnu, which both seemed satisfied to call “gee-new.” Bindle maintained that it was a lord of creation, whilst Ginger was equally convinced that it was what he described as “a milker.”

Mr. Hearty now had the appearance of a man possessed of some secret dread. He approached each pen or cage with suspicion, taking a hurried glance at the inmates before he ventured to pause for a closer inspection. Mr. Hearty was a man upon whom delicacy had descended as a blight.

Ginger’s other zoological titbit of information was concerned with the amazing characteristics of the camels. During the War he had served in Egypt.

“’Ain’t got no blinkin’ feelin’s, ’aven’t camels,” he announced. “Plug ’em through the innards an’ they jest ’iccup. I——” Ginger stopped suddenly, noticing a certain rigidity about Mrs. Bindle’s umbrella-arm.

“Look ’ere, Joe,” he grumbled a few minutes later. “If your missis lands me wiv ’er umbrella again, I’m goin’ to dot ’er one.”

Mr. Hearty received one shock. Much to his interest, he had discovered a skirt that was short even for London, and the limbs beneath were shapely. Mr. Hearty’s zoological interest became intensified.

“I am surprised at you!” cried a hoarse voice, almost in his ear.

Dropping his umbrella, he spun round with the air of a man discovered in some illicit act, only to face a moth-eaten parrot of dingy reds and yellows and blues with a huge bone beak.

By the time Mr. Hearty had retrieved his umbrella, the skirt, and what the skirt had inadequately covered, had disappeared.
III

Throughout the afternoon Bindle had been doing his utmost to head the party in the direction of the Monkey House, but both Mrs. Bindle and Mr. Hearty seemed determined to avoid that particular spot.

Matters were at length brought to a crisis by a remark from Ginger.

"Wot about the blinkin' monkeys?" he demanded, suddenly coming to a standstill. "We got to see them."

Mr. Hearty, who had stared violently at the adjective, looked across at Mrs. Bindle. She appeared to hesitate.

"You ain't been to the Zoo if you 'aven't seen the monkeys," said Bindle. "Come along, 'Earty, I know the way," with which he linked his arm through that of Mr. Hearty and made off in the direction of the Monkey House.

"Funny little blinkers, them monkeys," grumbled Ginger. He had been almost genial since the elephant's attack on Mrs. Bindle.

"Didn't 'alf spit in yer eye, did 'e?" he added, his mind still dwelling upon the delightful feeling he had experienced at seeing Mrs. Bindle blown upon by an elephant.

Mrs. Bindle lifted her chin. She disliked Ginger intensely.

"I'll thank you to keep your remarks to yourself," she said, drawing in her lips.

"Eh?" Ginger's mouth opened vacantly. With him it was a sign that he failed to understand.

"You've got a lewd tongue," continued Mrs. Bindle.

"No, I ain't," he contradicted, "it's fur. 'Ad a thick night last night, I did," he added, by way of explanation.

"It's what?" she demanded.

"Fur!" said Ginger, "Look!" and he produced from between his lips an unearthly looking thing of grey and blue and pink.

"You beast!" and with that Mrs. Bindle hurried forward, leaving the astonished Ginger with his tongue still protruding from his lips, puzzled to account for her reception of what, to him, was a friendly act. He showed his tongue to few women.

"If you don't stop that man saying disgusting things to me, Bindle, I shall tell a keeper," cried Mrs. Bindle on catching up with the others.
"'E's all right is ole Ging," said Bindle genially as he turned once more to Mr. Hearty, to whom he was explaining, much to Mr. Hearty's embarrassment, a certain incident he had seen in the Monkey House on the occasion of his last visit to the Zoo. The presence of Mrs. Bindle, however, robbed the story of much of its realism.

It had been Mr. Hearty's intention carefully to avoid the Monkey House. He recalled once having visited it with Mrs. Hearty, and her Rabelaisian mirth had embarrassed him so painfully that he had left the building, preferring to wait for her outside.

As the party entered the Monkey House, Mr. Hearty had the air of a man determined to see nothing he ought not to see. Mrs. Bindle was clearly on the defensive. She was prepared to retreat at the least manifestation of that from which, in her opinion, all nice-minded people should retire.

Ginger manifested eagerness, while Bindle's attitude was clearly that of a man who is approaching what he regards as "the tasty bit of the 'ole show," as he had just expressed it to his brother-in-law.

Mr. Hearty took the precaution of moving on ahead, leaving Mrs. Bindle wedged in a stream of people, with Bindle and Ginger in attendance.

Never had Bindle known Ginger so loquacious. He volunteered a great deal of information about monkeys, most of which was inaccurate; he seemed to have a considerable store of recollections upon which to draw.

Bindle fed the stream of reminiscence by judicious enquiry. Mr. Hearty was doing better than he had anticipated. He decided that the Monkey House was obviously a place to visit alone.

"Look, Joe!" cried Ginger, his freckled face assuming an expression of almost animation. "Look at them two up there. Tell your missis!" Ginger was too wise to address Mrs. Bindle directly.

"Hi!" Ginger called to Mr. Hearty. "See that?" and he pointed to a bar on which a monkey was lying luxuriously extended, whilst a colleague was going over him as with a toothcomb.

"'E don't 'alf like it," cried Ginger, his eyes fixed upon the pair. "Look, 'e's turning over." Ginger was determined that no one should lose the most trifling detail or incident if he could avoid it.
"If you don't stop that man, I'll hit him again," hissed Mrs. Bindle, in Bindle's ear.

"Stop, Ging!" cried Bindle incredulously. "You might jest as well 'ave tried to stop the War as ole Ging when 'e gets on monkeys. There's only two things wom really sets 'im goin'; one's bell-tents an' the other's monkeys. You been in a bell-tent, now you——"

"Look!" cried Ginger excitedly. "Look at that little blinker!" In his eagerness he failed to realise that Bindle and Mrs. Bindle had changed positions, and he nudged her where Mrs. Bindle strongly objected to being nudged.

Without a moment's hesitation she jabbed the handle of her umbrella in Ginger's direction. The ferrule, however, caught in the cage and prodded a large grey monkey, attracting its attention from behind. In a flash it seemed to swing up above the netting and, a moment later, a long mole-coloured arm darted out from between the bars.

There was a scream and Mrs. Bindle stood bonnetless, her thin sandy hair hanging in wisps about her hatchet-like head, while an ecstatic monkey, with a purple and green bonnet, was swiftly retreating to the highest and most inaccessible portion of the cage.

"Stop him!" she cried wildly, recovering from the shock. "He's got my bonnet."

For the second time that afternoon Ginger laughed, a loud raucous bark that seemed to goad Mrs. Bindle to fury.

"You brute!" she cried. "It was your fault." She made another lunge at Ginger with her umbrella, missed him and caught Bindle on the side of the nose.

With a yelp of pain he clapped his hand to his face.

"'Ere, what are you doin', Lizzie?" he yelled.

"That monkey's got my bonnet! Here, you!" she cried, as a keeper pushed his way through the crowd.

"Go in and get it!" she ordered, as the keeper came alongside.

"I can't do that, mum," said the man civilly.

"Then I'll report you," was the furious retort. "I want to see the manager."

"See the what?"

"The manager—the manager of the Zoo," she added, as if to leave no doubt as to the identity of him with whom she desired speech.

The man scratched his head through his cap.
There was a scream and Mrs. Bindle stood bonnetless, her thin, sandy hair hanging in wisps about her hatchet-like head.
"You mean the secretary, mum," he ventured. "He isn’t here on Sundays."

"I want my bonnet!" cried Mrs. Bindle, making frantic efforts to tuck away the wayward strands of sandy hair, her eyes fixed upon the robber of her headgear.

"Tie your handkerchief over your head," suggested a little man whose face radiated friendliness.

"Hold your tongue!" snapped Mrs. Bindle; then, turning to the keeper, she demanded.

"Are you going to get my bonnet?"

The keeper once more explained the impossibility of the task.

"Then I shall report you!" she announced for the second time. "I can’t go home like this. Where’s Mr. Hearty?" she demanded, looking about her. But Mr. Hearty was making no effort to push his way to the front; on the contrary, he had allowed himself to be forced to the outer edge of the crowd.

Attracted by the unusual sight of a bonnet in the possession of their comrade, the other monkeys had made a rush in its direction. By this time a wild game of follow-my-leader was in progress.

At length the possessor of the bonnet secured a corner at the top of the cage, on which all but a frontal attack was impossible. Here it proceeded to dissect Mrs. Bindle’s millinery, the other monkeys forming an eager group before him.

As it tore the bonnet bit by bit, each portion was subjected to a careful scrutiny. When apparently satisfied that there could be no difficulty about identifying that particular piece, the long grey arm handed it to one of the waiting group. Soon the bonnet which had caused Mrs. Bindle much thought and labour was being put to a decorative use by the monkeys in a way which, as she later explained to Mrs. Hearty, made her feel hot all over.

The crowd was delighted.

In escaping from Mrs. Bindle, Ginger had captured Mr. Hearty and, with a wealth of expletive, was explaining to him what had happened.

"Pinched ‘er blinkin’ bonnet—look!" he cried, as one of the monkeys adorned himself grotesquely with a piece of green ribbon. "Blinkin’ ole guy, ain’t she?" he muttered, leaning towards Mr. Hearty.

Mr. Hearty started back. Although a greengrocer, he disliked onions—at least, second-hand.
"I don't 'old wiv women," cried Ginger, his eyes still fixed on the gambols of the monkeys. "Streamin' well better orf wivout 'em. Got one of yer own?" he enquired.

Mr. Hearty was relieved from the necessity of replying by Mrs. Bindle once more demanding to see the manager.

"I tell you, I'm not going home like this," she announced.
"Well, you can't stay here all night," said the keeper gravely. "We shuts at half-past six."
"Then bring the manager to see me."
"I tell you, there ain't no manager. This ain't a music-hall."

"Look 'ere, ole sport," said Bindle, drawing the keeper aside. "Ave you got an 'at the missis can go 'ome in?"

The man pondered and once more scratched his head through his hat.

"I might be able to get you the loan of such a thing, mate," he responded. "You wait 'ere; I'll go an' see wot I can find. I don't live on the place myself; but some of us do, with their missises. She yours?" he enquired, jerking his head in the direction of Mrs. Bindle.

Bindle nodded.

"Well, you got my sympathy, mate," he said as he moved off.

A few minutes later he returned with the suggestion that Mrs. Bindle should accompany him in search of headgear. Without a word she acquiesced, relieved at the prospect of escaping from the gaze of the crowd, which instinctively she felt was unsympathetic.

"Of all the bloomin' larks!" cried Ginger, slapping a biscuit-coloured thigh in high good-humour. Then a moment later, he added: "Why ain't there a blinking pub in this 'ere place?"

Ginger's thoughts gravitated towards beer as inevitably as the needle of a compass points to the magnetic pole. The more dramatic the action, the more insistent became his thirst.

Mr. Hearty was endeavouring to edge away from Ginger and his brother-in-law; he had the appearance of a man who is trying to lose a dog that has no intention of being lost.

Ginger continued to assure Mr. Hearty of the intensity of his enjoyment of the afternoon's entertainment, and he did so amidst a stress of picturesque language that seemed almost to numb Mr. Hearty's faculties.
Ginger's description of Mrs. Bindle's appearance at length drew from Bindle a protest.

"Look 'ere, Ging! If it 'ad been your 'at, it wouldn't have seemed so funny, would it?"

In Ginger's eyes was a puzzled look—he was thinking.

"Oh, my Gawd?"

The exclamation broke involuntarily from Bindle.

Coming towards them, elbowing the crowd with characteristic determination, was Mrs. Bindle. Her dress was the same, her expression of uncompromising disapproval was the same, her umbrella was the same, and the narrow-palmed, biscuit-coloured gloves were those with which she had set out upon her day's pleasures. For all that it seemed an entirely new Mrs. Bindle that approached the three men, and Bindle in his own idiom had expressed the view of all.

In place of her austerely correct bonnet, built up high in front like the bows of a modern destroyer, was a felt hat, which industry and pipe-clay had failed to restore to its original whiteness.

The brim was narrow and shaped like a saucer, while round the crown was a faded pale blue ribbon.

"Come on, Joe," whispered Ginger hoarsely, conscious of the grins of those around him. "Let's go 'an' see the kangaroos," and Bindle and Ginger melted away, leaving Mrs. Bindle to Mr. Hearty, in whose direction she was making.

That afternoon Mr. Hearty suffered as he had never suffered before.

It was only a sense of nakedness that seemed capable of offending Mrs. Bindle. The consciousness that on her head was a hat seemed to satisfy her. She appeared to be oblivious of the fact that as she passed heads turned automatically and arms nudged into sides.

To the hypersensitive Mr. Hearty, however, this was only too apparent. Three times he suggested that they should return home, and three times Mrs. Bindle told him of things she yet desired to see.

Finally, in desperation, Mr. Hearty suggested tea. For one thing he wanted refreshment, and for another he felt that, sitting down, Mrs. Bindle would attract less attention.

Mrs. Bindle made quite a hearty meal. The absence of Ginger and Bindle had raised her spirits.

It was, however, on the way home in the Tube that Mr. Hearty's misery and embarrassment reached its culminating
point. Seated opposite to them was a child of an enquiring
turn of mind, accompanied by a particularly affectionate mother.
From the first the child’s attention was attracted by Mrs.
Bindle. For some time the younger gazed at her head in
speculative wonder.
Just before she had entered the carriage, the doting mother
had found occasion to censure her offspring by saying that
only bad people made themselves conspicuous in railway
carriages.
The rebuke had gone home. After a thorough examination
of Mrs. Bindle’s hat and person, and choosing a moment when
the train was in the station, the child turned to its mother and
in a shrill voice enquired:
“Mummie, is that a bad woman?” and the child’s index
finger indicated Mrs. Bindle.
JUKE JUDKINS' COURTSHIP

I am the only son of a considerable brazier in Birmingham, who, dying in 1803, left me successor to the business, with no other encumbrance than a sort of rent-charge, which I am enjoined to pay out of it, of ninety-three pounds sterling per annum, to his widow, my mother: and which the improving state of the concern, I bless God, has hitherto enabled me to discharge with punctuality. (I say, I am enjoined to pay the said sum, but not strictly obligated: that is to say, as the will is worded, I believe the law would relieve me from the payment of it; but the wishes of a dying parent should in some sort have the effect of law.) So that, though the annual profits of my business, on an average of the last three or four years, would appear to an indifferent observer, who should inspect my shop-books, to amount to the sum of one thousand three hundred and three pounds, odd shilling, the real proceeds in that time have fallen short of that sum to the amount of the aforesaid payment of ninety-three pounds sterling annually.

I was always my father's favourite. He took a delight to the very last in recounting the little sagacious tricks and innocent artifices of my childhood. One manifestation thereof I never heard him repeat without tears of joy trickling down his cheeks. It seems, that when I quitted the parental roof (Aug. 27, 1788), being then six years and not quite a month old, to proceed to the Free School at Warwick, where my father was a sort of trustee, my mother—as mothers are usually provident on these occasions—had stuffed the pockets of the coach, which was to convey me and six more children of my own growth that were going to be entered along with me at the same seminary, with a prodigious quantity of ginger-
bread, which I remembered my father said was more than was needed: and so indeed it was; for, if I had been to eat it all myself, it would have got stale and mouldy before it had been half spent. The consideration whereof set me upon my contrivances how I might secure to myself as much of the gingerbread as would keep good for the next two or three days, and yet none of the rest in manner be wasted. I had a little pair of pocket-compasses, which I usually carried about me for the purpose of making draughts and measurements, at which I was always very ingenious, of the various engines and mechanical inventions in which such a town as Birmingham abounded.

By means of these, and a small penknife which my father had given me, I cut out the one half of the cake, calculating that the remainder would reasonably serve my turn; and subdividing it into many little slices, which were curious to see for the neatness and niceness of their proportion, I sold it out in so many pennyworths to my young companions as served us all the way to Warwick, which is a distance of some twenty miles from this town: and very merry, I assure you, we made ourselves with it, feasting all the way. By this honest stratagem I put double the prime cost of the gingerbread into my purse, and secured as much as I thought would keep good and moist for my next two or three days' eating.

When I told this to my parents on their first visit to me at Warwick, my father (good man) patted me on the cheek, and stroked my head, and seemed as if he could never make enough of me; but my mother unaccountably burst into tears, and said, "it was a very niggardly action," or some such expression, and that "she would rather it would please God to take me"—meaning (God help me) that I should die—"than that she should live to see me grow up a mean man," which shows the difference of parent from parent, and how some mothers are more harsh and intolerant to their children than some fathers; when we might expect quite the contrary.

My father, however, loaded me with presents from that time, which made me the envy of my school-fellows. As I felt this growing disposition in them, I naturally sought to avert it by all the means in my power; and from that time I used to eat my little packages of fruit, and other nice things, in a corner, so privately that I was never found out. Once, I remember, I had a huge apple sent me, of that sort which they call cats'-heads. I concealed this all day under my pillow;
and at night, but not before I had ascertained that my bed-fellow was sound asleep,—which I did by pinching him rather smartly two or three times, which he seemed to perceive no more than a dead person, though once or twice he made a motion as if he would turn, which frightened me,—I say, when I had made all sure, I fell to work upon my apple; and, though it was as big as an ordinary man's two fists, I made shift to get through it before it was time to get up. And a more delicious feast I never made; thinking all night what a good parent I had (I mean my father) to send me so many nice things, when the poor lad that lay by me had no parent or friend in the world to send him anything nice; and thinking of his desolate condition, I munched and munched as silently as I could, that I might not set him a-longing if he overheard me.

And yet, for all this considerateness and attention to other people's feelings, I was never much a favourite with my schoolfellows; which I have often wondered at, seeing that I never defrauded any one of them of the value of a halfpenny, or told stories of them to their master, as some little lying boys would do, but was ready to do any of them all the services in my power, that were consistent with my own well-doing. I think nobody can be expected to go farther than that.

But I am detaining my reader too long in recording my juvenile days. It is time I should go forward to a season when it became natural that I should have some thoughts of marrying, and, as they say, settling in the world. Nevertheless, my reflections on what I may call the boyish period of my life may have their use to some readers. It is pleasant to trace the man in the boy; to observe shoots of generosity in those young years; and to watch the progress of liberal sentiments, and what I may call a genteel way of thinking, which is discernible in some children at a very early age, and usually lays the foundation of all that is praiseworthy in the manly character afterwards.

With the warmest inclinations towards that way of life, and a serious conviction of its superior advantages over a single one, it has been the strange infelicity of my lot never to have entered into the respectable estate of matrimony.

Yet I was once very near it.

I courted a young woman in my twenty-seventh year; for so early I began to feel symptoms of the tender passion! She was well-to-do in the world, as they call it; but yet not such a fortune as, all things considered, perhaps I might have

T.H.B.
pretended to. It was not my own choice altogether; but my mother very strongly pressed me to it. She was always putting it to me, that I had "comings-in sufficient,"—that I "need not stand upon a portion"; though the young woman, to do her justice, had considerable expectations, which yet did not quite come up to my mark, as I told you before.

My mother had this saying always in her mouth, that I had "money enough"; that it was time I enlarged my housekeeping, and to show a spirit befitting my circumstances. In short, what with her importunities, and my own desires in part co-operating,—for, as I said, I was not yet quite twenty-seven,—a time when the youthful feelings may be pardoned if they show a little impetuosity,—I resolved, I say, upon all these considerations, to set about the business of courting in right earnest. I was a young man then; and having a spice of romance in my character (as the reader has doubtless observed long ago), such as that sex is apt to be taken with, I had reason in no long time to think that my addresses were anything but disagreeable. Certainly the happiest part of a young man’s life is the time when he is going a-courting. All the generous impulses are then awake, and he feels a double existence in participating his hopes and wishes with another being.

Return yet again for a brief moment, ye visionary views, transient enchantments! ye moonlight rambles with Cleora in the Silent Walk at Vauxhall (N.B.—About a mile from Birmingham, and resembling the gardens of that name near London, only that the price of admission is lower), when the nightingale has suspended her notes in June to listen to our loving discourses, while the moon was overhead! (for we generally used to take our tea at Cleora’s mother’s before we set out, not so much to save expenses as to avoid the publicity of a repast in the gardens,—coming in much about the time of half-price, as they call it,) ye soft intercommunions of soul, when, exchanging mutual vows, we prattled of coming felicities! The loving disputes we have had under those trees, when this house (planning our future settlement) was rejected, because, though cheap, it was dull; and the other house was given up, because, though agreeably situated, it was too high-rented!—one was too much in the heart of the town, another was too far from business.

These minutiae will seem impertinent to the aged and prudent. I write them only to the young. Young lovers,
and passionate as being young (such were Cleora and I then),
alone can understand me. After some weeks wasted, as I may
now call it, in this sort of amorous colloquy, we at length fixed
upon the house in the High Street, No. 203, just vacated by
the death of Mr. Hutton of this town, for our future residence.
I had all the time lived in lodgings (only renting a shop for
business), to be near my mother,—near, I say: not in the same
house: for that would have been to introduce confusion into
our housekeeping, which it was desirable to keep separate. Oh,
the loving wrangles, the endearing differences, I had with
Cleora, before we could quite make up our minds to the house
that was to receive us!—I pretending, for argument’s sake,
the rent was too high, and she insisting that the taxes were
moderate in proportion: and love at last reconciling us in the
same choice. I think at that time, moderately speaking, she
might have had anything out of me for asking. I do not, nor
shall ever, regret that my character at that time was marked
with a tinge of prodigality. Age comes fast enough upon us,
and, in its good time, will prune away all that is inconvenient
in these excesses. Perhaps it is right that it should do so.

Matters, as I said, were ripening to a conclusion between
us, only the house was yet not absolutely taken, some necessary
arrangements, which the ardour of my youthful impetuosity
could hardly brook at that time (love and youth will be precipi-
tate),—some preliminary arrangements, I say, with the
landlord, respecting fixtures,—very necessary things to be
considered in a young man about to settle in the world, though
not very accordant with the impatient state of my then passions,
—some obstacles about the valuation of the fixtures,—had
hitherto precluded (and I shall always think providentially) my
final closes with his offer; when one of those accidents, which,
unimportant in themselves, often arise to give a turn to the most
serious intentions of our life, intervened, and put an end at
once to my projects of wiving, and of housekeeping.

I was never much given to theatrical entertainments; that
is, at no time of my life was I ever what they call a regular play-
goer: but on some occasion of a benefit-night, which was
expected to be very productive, and indeed turned out so,
Cleora expressing a desire to be present, I could do no less than
offer, as I did very willingly, to squire her and her mother to
the pit. At that time it was not customary in our town for
tradesfolk, except some of the very topping ones, to sit, as they
now do, in the boxes.
At the time appointed I waited upon the ladies, who had brought with them a young man, a distant relation, whom, it seems, they had invited to be of the party. This a little disconcerted me, as I had about me barely silver enough to pay for our three selves at the door, and did not at first know that their relation had proposed paying for himself. However, to do the young man justice, he not only paid for himself, but for the old lady besides; leaving me only to pay for two, as it were. In our passage to the theatre the notice of Cleora was attracted to some orange wenches that stood about the doors vending their commodities. She was leaning on my arm; and I could feel her every now and then giving me a nudge, as it is called, which I afterwards discovered were hints that I should buy some oranges.

It seems, it is a custom at Birmingham, and perhaps in other places, when a gentleman treats ladies to the play,—especially when a full night is expected, and that the house will be inconveniently warm,—to provide them with this kind of fruit, oranges being esteemed for their cooling property. But how could I guess at that, never having treated ladies to a play before, and being, as I said, quite a novice at entertainments of this kind?

At last, she spoke plain out, and begged that I would buy some of "those oranges," pointing to a particular barrow. But, when I came to examine the fruit, I did not think the quality of it was answerable to the price. In this way I handled several baskets of them; but something in them all displeased me. Some had thin rinds, and some were plainly over-ripe, which is as great a fault as not being ripe enough; and I could not (what they call) make a bargain.

While I stood haggling with the woman, secretly determining to put off my purchase till I should get within the theatre, where I expected we should have better choice, the young man, the cousin (who, it seems had left us without my missing him), came running to us with his pockets stuffed out with oranges, inside and out, as they say. It seems, not liking the look of the barrow-fruit any more than myself, he had shipped away to an eminent fruitier’s, about three doors distant, which I never had the sense to think of, and had laid out a matter of two shillings in some of the best St. Michael’s I think I ever tasted.

What a little hinge, as I said before, the most important affairs in life may turn upon! The mere inadvertence to the
fact that there was an eminent fruiterer's within three doors of us, though we had just passed it without the thought once occurring to me, which he had taken advantage of, lost me the affection of my Cleora. From that time she visibly cooled towards me; and her partiality was as visibly transferred to this cousin. I was long unable to account for this change in her behaviour; when one day, accidently discoursing of oranges to my mother, alone, she let drop a sort of reproach to me, as if I had offended Cleora by my nearness as she called it, that evening.

Even now, when Cleora has been wedded some years to that same officious relation, as I may call him, I can hardly be persuaded that such a trifle could have been the motive for her inconstancy; for could she suppose that I would sacrifice my dearest hopes in her to the paltry sum of two shillings, when I was going to treat her to the play, and her mother too (an expense of more than four times that amount), if the young man had not interfered to pay for the latter, as I mentioned?

But the caprices of the sex are past finding out: and I begin to think my mother was in the right; for doubtless women know women better than we can pretend to know them.
SOAKED IN SEAWEED

or,

UPSET IN THE OCEAN

(An Old-fashioned Sea Story)

It was in August in 1867 that I stepped on board the deck of the *Saucy Sally*, lying in dock at Gravesend, to fill the berth of second mate.

Let me first say a word about myself.

I was a tall, handsome young fellow, squarely and powerfully built, bronzed by the sun and the moon (and even copper-coloured in spots from the effect of the stars), and with a face in which honesty, intelligence, and exceptional brain power were combined with Christianity, simplicity, and modesty.

As I stepped on the deck I could not help a slight feeling of triumph, as I caught sight of my sailor-like features reflected in a tar-barrel that stood beside the mast, while a little later I could scarcely repress a sense of gratification as I noticed them reflected again in a bucket of bilge water.

"Welcome on board, Mr. Blowhard," called out Captain Bilge, stepping out of the binnacle and shaking hands across the taffrail.

I saw before me a fine sailor-like man of from thirty to sixty, clean-shaven, except for an enormous pair of whiskers, a heavy beard, and a thick moustache, powerful in build, and carrying his beam well aft, in a pair of broad duck trousers across the back of which there would have been room to write a history of the British Navy.

Beside him were the first and third mates, both of them being quiet men of poor stature, who looked at Captain Bilge
with what seemed to me an apprehensive expression in their eyes.

The vessel was on the eve of departure. Her deck presented that scene of bustle and alacrity dear to the sailor's heart. Men were busy nailing up the masts, hanging the bowsprit over the side, varnishing the lee-scuppers, and pouring hot tar down the companion-way.

Captain Bilge, with a megaphone to his lips, kept calling out to the men in his rough sailor fashion:

"Now, then, don't over-exert yourselves, gentlemen. Remember, please, that we have plenty of time. Keep out of the sun as much as you can. Step carefully in the rigging there, Jones; I fear it's just a little high for you. Tut, tut, Williams, don't get yourself so dirty with that tar, you won't look fit to be seen."

I stood leaning over the gaff of the mainsail and thinking—yes, thinking, dear reader, of my mother. I hope that you will think none the less of me for that. Whenever things look dark, I lean up against something and think of mother. If they get positively black, I stand on one leg and think of father. After that I can face anything.

Did I think, too, of another, younger than mother and fairer than father? Yes, I did. "Bear up, darling," I had whispered as she nestled her head beneath my oilskins and kicked out backward with one heel in the agony of her girlish grief, "in five years the voyage will be over, and after three more like it, I shall come back with money enough to buy a second-hand fishing-net and settle down on shore."

Meantime the ship's preparations were complete. The masts were all in position, the sails nailed up, and men with axes were busily chopping away the gangway.

"All ready?" called the Captain.

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Then hoist the anchor in board and send a man down with the key to open the bar."

Opening the bar! the last sad rite of departure. How often in my voyages have I seen it; the little group of men soon to be exiled from their home, standing about with saddened faces, waiting to see the man with the key open the bar—held there by some strange fascination.

Next morning with a fair wind astern we had buzzed around the corner of England and were running down the Channel.
I know no finer sight, for those who have never seen it, than the English Channel. It is the highway of the world. Ships of all nations are passing up and down, Dutch, Scotch, Venezuelan, and even American.

Chinese junks rush to and fro. Warships, motor yachts, icebergs, and lumber rafts are everywhere. If I add to this fact that so thick a fog hangs over it that it is entirely hidden from sight, my readers can form some idea of the majesty of the scene.

We had now been three days at sea. My first sea-sickness was wearing off, and I thought less of father.

On the third morning Captain Bilge descended to my cabin.

"Mr. Blowhard," he said, "I must ask you to stand double watches."

"What is the matter?" I inquired.

"The two other mates have fallen overboard," he said uneasily, and avoiding my eye.

I contented myself with saying, "Very good, sir," but I could not help thinking it a trifle odd that both the mates should have fallen overboard in the same night.

Surely there was some mystery in this.

Two mornings later the Captain appeared at the breakfast-table with the same shifting and uneasy look in his eye.

"Anything wrong, sir?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered, trying to appear at ease and twisting a fried egg to and fro between his fingers with such nervous force as almost to break it in two—"I regret to say that we have lost the bosun."

"The bosun!" I cried.

"Yes," said Captain Bilge more quietly, "he is overboard. I blame myself for it, partly. It was early this morning. I was holding him up in my arms to look at an iceberg, and, quite accidentally I assure you—I dropped him overboard."

"Captain Bilge," I asked, "have you taken any steps to recover him?"

"Not as yet," he replied uneasily.

I looked at him fixedly, but said nothing.

Ten days passed.

The mystery thickened. On Thursday two men of the starboard watch were reported missing. On Friday the carpenter's assistant disappeared. On the night of Saturday a
circumstance occurred which, slight as it was, gave me some clue as to what was happening.

As I stood at the wheel about midnight, I saw the Captain approach in the darkness carrying the cabin-boy by the hind leg. The lad was a bright little fellow, whose merry disposition had already endeared him to me, and I watched with some interest to see what the Captain would do to him. Arrived at the stern of the vessel, Captain Bilge looked cautiously around a moment and then dropped the boy into the sea. For a brief instant the lad’s head appeared in the phosphorus of the waves. The Captain threw a boot at him, sighed deeply, and went below.

Here then was the key to the mystery! The Captain was throwing the crew overboard. Next morning we met at breakfast as usual.

“Poor little Williams has fallen overboard,” said the Captain, seizing a strip of ship’s bacon and tearing at it with his teeth as if he almost meant to eat it.

“Captain,” I said, greatly excited, stabbing at a ship’s loaf in my agitation with such ferocity as almost to drive my knife into it—“You threw that boy overboard!”

“I did,” said Captain Bilge, grown suddenly quiet, “I threw them all over and intend to throw the rest. Listen, Blowhard, you are young, ambitious, and trustworthy. I will confide in you.”

Perfectly calm now, he stepped to a locker, rummaged in it a moment, and drew out a faded piece of yellow parchment, which he spread on the table. It was a map or chart. In the centre of it was a circle. In the middle of the circle was a small dot and a letter T, while at one side of the map was a letter N, and against it on the other side a letter S.

“What is this?” I asked.

“Can you not guess?” queried Captain Bilge. “It is a desert island.”

“Ah!” I rejoined with a sudden flash of intuition, “and N is for North and S is for South.”

“Blowhard,” said the Captain, striking the table with such force as to cause a loaf of ship’s bread to bounce up and down three or four times, “you’ve struck it. That part of it had not yet occurred to me.”

“And the letter T?” I asked.

“The treasure, the buried treasure,” said the Captain, and turning the map over he read from the back of it—“The
point T indicates the spot where the treasure is buried under the sand; it consists of half a million Spanish dollars, and is buried in a brown leather dress-suit case."

"And where is the island?" I inquired, mad with excitement.

"That I do not know," said the Captain. "I intend to sail up and down the parallels of latitude until I find it."

"And meantime?"

"Meantime, the first thing to do is to reduce the number of the crew so as to have fewer hands to divide among. Come, come," he added in a burst of frankness which made me love the man in spite of his shortcomings, "will you join me in this? We'll throw them all over, keeping the cook to the last, dig up the treasure, and be rich for the rest of our lives."

Reader, do you blame me if I said yes? I was young, ardent, ambitious, full of bright hopes and boyish enthusiasm.

"Captain Bilge," I said, putting my hand in his, "I am yours."

"Good," he said, "now go forward to the forecastle and get an idea what the men are thinking."

I went forward to the men's quarters—a plain room in the front of the ship, with only a rough carpet on the floor, a few simple arm-chairs, writing-desks, spittoons of a plain pattern, and small brass beds with blue-and-green screens. It was Sunday morning, and the men were mostly sitting about in their dressing-gowns.

They rose as I entered and curtseyed.

"Sir," said Tompkins, the bosun's mate, "I think it my duty to tell you that there is a great deal of dissatisfaction among the men."

Several of the men nodded.

"They don't like the way the men keep going overboard," he continued, his voice rising to a tone of uncontrolled passion. "It is positively absurd, sir, and if you will allow me to say so, the men are far from pleased."

"Tompkins," I said sternly, "you must understand that my position will not allow me to listen to mutinous language of this sort."

I returned to the Captain. "I think the men mean mutiny," I said.

"Good," said Captain Bilge, rubbing his hands, "that will get rid of a lot of them, and of course," he added musingly, looking out of the broad old-fashioned port-hole at the stern
of the cabin, at the heaving waves of the South Atlantic, "I am expecting pirates at any time, and that will take out quite a few of them. However"—and here he pressed the bell for a cabin-boy—"kindly ask Mr. Tompkins to step this way."

"Tompkins," said the Captain as the bosun's mate entered, "be good enough to stand on the locker and stick your head through the stern port-hole, and tell me what you think of the weather."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the tar with a simplicity which caused us to exchange a quiet smile.

Tompkins stood on the locker and put his head and shoulders out of the port.

Taking a leg each we pushed him through. We heard him plump into the sea.

"Tompkins was easy," said Captain Bilge. "Excuse me as I enter his death in the log."

"Yes," he continued presently, "it will be a great help if they mutiny. I suppose they will, sooner or later. It's customary to do so. But I shall take no step to precipitate it until we have first fallen in with pirates. I am expecting them in these latitudes at any time. Meantime, Mr. Blowhard," he said, rising, "if you can continue to drop overboard one or two more each week, I shall feel extremely grateful."

Three days later we rounded the Cape of Good Hope and entered upon the inky waters of the Indian Ocean. Our course lay now in zigzags and, the weather being favourable, we sailed up and down at a furious rate over a sea as calm as glass.

On the fourth day a pirate ship appeared. Reader, I do not know if you have ever seen a pirate ship. The sight was one to appal the stoutest heart. The entire ship was painted black, a black flag hung at the masthead, the sails were black, and on the deck people dressed all in black walked up and down arm-in-arm. The words "Pirate Ship" were painted in white letters on the bow. At the sight of it our crew were visibly cowed. It was a spectacle that would have cowed a dog.

The two ships were brought side by side. They were then lashed tightly together with bag string and binder twine, and a gang plank laid between them. In a moment the pirates swarmed upon our deck, rolling their eyes, gnashing their teeth, and filing their nails.

Then the fight began. It lasted two hours—with fifteen minutes off for lunch. It was awful. The men grappled with
one another, kicked one another from behind, slapped one another across the face, and in many cases completely lost their temper and tried to bite one another. I noticed one gigantic fellow brandishing a knotted towel, and striking right and left among our men, until Captain Bilge rushed at him and struck him flat across the mouth with a banana skin.

At the end of two hours, by mutual consent, the fight was declared a draw. The points standing at sixty-one and a half against sixty-two.

The ships were unlashed, and with three cheers from each crew, were headed on their way.

"Now, then," said the Captain to me aside, "let us see how many of the crew are sufficiently exhausted to be thrown overboard."

He went below. In a few minutes he reappeared, his face deadly pale. "Blowhard," he said, "the ship is sinking. One of the pirates (sheer accident, of course, I blame no one) has kicked a hole in the side. Let us sound the well."

We put our ear to the ship's well. It sounded like water.

The men were put to the pumps and worked with the frenzied effort which only those who have been drowned in a sinking ship can understand.

At six p.m. the well marked one half an inch of water, at nightfall three-quarters of an inch, and at daybreak, after a night of unremitting toil, seven-eighths of an inch.

By noon of the next day the water had risen to fifteen-sixteenths of an inch, and on the next night the sounding showed thirty-one thirty-seconds of an inch of water in the hold. The situation was desperate. At this rate of increase few, if any, could tell where it would rise to in a few days.

That night the Captain called me to his cabin. He had a book of mathematical tables in front of him, and great sheets of vulgar fractions littered the floor on all sides.

"The ship is bound to sink," he said, "in fact, Blowhard, she is sinking. I can prove it. It may be six months or it may take years, but if she goes on like this, sink she must. There is nothing for it but to abandon her."

That night, in the dead of darkness, while the crew were busy at the pumps, the Captain and I built a raft.

Unobserved we cut down the masts, chopped them into suitable lengths, laid them crosswise in a pile and lashed them tightly together with bootlaces.

Hastily we threw on board a couple of boxes of food and
bottles of drinking fluid, a sextant, a chronometer, a gas-meter, a bicycle pump, and a few other scientific instruments. Then taking advantage of a roll in the motion of the ship, we launched the raft, lowered ourselves upon a line, and under cover of the heavy dark of a tropical night, we paddled away from the doomed vessel.

The break of day found us a tiny speck on the Indian Ocean. We looked about as big as this (.).

In the morning, after dressing, and shaving as best we could, we opened our box of food and drink.
Then came the awful horror of our situation.

One by one the Captain took from the box the square blue tins of canned beef which it contained. We counted fifty-two in all. Anxiously and with drawn faces we watched until the last can was lifted from the box. A single thought was in our minds. When the end came the Captain stood up on the raft with wild eyes staring at the sky.

"The can-opener!" he shrieked, "just Heaven, the can-opener." He fell prostrate.

Meantime, with trembling hands, I opened the box of bottles. It contained lager beer bottles, each with a patent tin top. One by one I took them out. There were fifty-two in all. As I withdrew the last one and saw the empty box before me, I shrieked out—"The thing! the thing! oh, merciful Heaven! The thing you open them with!"

I fell prostrate upon the Captain.

We awoke to find ourselves still a mere speck upon the ocean. We felt even smaller than before.

Over us was the burnished copper sky of the tropics. The heavy, leaden sea lapped the sides of the raft. All about us was a litter of corn beef cans and lager beer bottles. Our sufferings in the ensuing days were indescribable. We beat and thumped at the cans with our fists. Even at the risk of spoiling the tins for ever we hammered them fiercely against the raft. We stamped on them, bit at them and swore at them. We pulled and clawed at the bottles with our hands, and chipped and knocked them against the cans, regardless even of breaking the glass and ruining the bottles.

It was futile.

Then day after day we sat in moody silence, gnawed with hunger, with nothing to read, nothing to smoke, and practically nothing to talk about.

On the tenth day the Captain broke silence.
“Get ready the lots, Blowhard,” he said. “It’s got to come to that.”

“Yes,” I answered drearily, “we’re getting thinner every day.”

Then, with the awful prospect of cannibalism before us, we drew lots.

I prepared the lots and held them to the Captain. He drew the longer one.

“Which does that mean,” he asked, trembling between hope and despair. “Do I win?”

“No, Bilge,” I said sadly, “you lose.”

But I mustn’t dwell on the days that followed—the long quiet days of lazy dreaming on the raft, during which I slowly built up my strength, which had been shattered by privation. They were days, dear reader, of deep and quiet peace, and yet I cannot recall them without shedding a tear for the brave man who made them what they were.

It was on the fifth day after that I was awakened from a sound sleep by the bumping of the raft against the shore. I had eaten perhaps overheartily, and had not observed the vicinity of land.

Before me was an island, the circular shape of which, with its low, sandy shore, recalled at once its identity.

“The treasure island,” I cried, “at last I am rewarded for all my heroism.”

In a fever of haste I rushed to the centre of the island. What was the sight that confronted me? A great hollow scooped in the sand, an empty dress-suit case lying beside it, and on a ship’s plank driven deep into the sand, the legend, “Saucy Sally, October, 1867.” So! the miscreants had made good the vessel, headed it for the island of whose existence they must have learned from the chart we so carelessly left upon the cabin table, and had plundered poor Bilge and me of our well-earned treasure!

Sick with the sense of human ingratitude I sank upon the sand.

The island became my home.

There I Ecked out a miserable existence, feeding on sand and gravel, and dressing myself in cactus plants. Years passed. Eating sand and mud slowly undermined my robust constitution. I fell ill. I died. I buried myself.

Would that others who write sea stories would do as much.