

THE MYSTERY LADY

CHAPTER I

THE ADVENTURE OF THE GIRL'S BROTHER

I

THAT was the trouble with the boy when he came into his own money—a headstrong desire to prove himself a grown man—a reaction, probably, from twenty years of apron-strings, from which the death of his widowed mother and the advent of his majority set him free.

Now he was through with advice. He was through with having anybody tell him anything. He was now ready to tell the world. . . . At twenty-one.

His sister could do nothing with him. He was sensitive, stubborn, cocksure of himself. He flared up at any hint of admonition, of authority, of pressure.

He was neither vicious nor weak: he was a healthy cub suddenly unleashed in the world's very large backyard. It went to his head, and he raced all over the place, intoxicated by a freedom with which he did not know what to do.

There's always some dog-catcher watching for crazy pups.

A Mr. Barney Welper made the boy's acquaintance one evening in the club at Palm Beach. At West Palm Beach there was a religious revival and prohibition rally, whither, it appeared, Mr. Welper was bound. That he could not induce the boy to go saddened Mr. Welper.

So, as the boy did not take readily to the spiritual, Mr. Welper tried him with the material.

Like the Red Fisherman who has such a varied assort-

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ment of bait in his bait-box, Mr. Welper therefore charged the lure and put on a gang-hook garnished with cruder bait.

So several enormously wealthy friends of Mr. Welper sauntered on to the stage, taking their several and familiar cues in turn.

The first of these was a very pretty brunette woman of thirty—a Mrs. Helen Wyvern. She had been “misunderstood,” it appeared.

After half an hour on the beach with her the boy discovered that Mrs. Wyvern was the first woman who ever had “understood” him.

Still all aquiver with wonder, pride and gratitude, he met another friend of Mr. Welper—a Mr. Eugene Renton.

Mrs. Wyvern whispered to the boy that, like Mr. Welper and herself, Mr. Renton was making millions out of Orizava Oil. The rest is redundant.

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When the boy's money went into Orizava Oil they fed him “dividends” until his last penny was up.

He was proudly a part of Orizava Oil. On a salary he travelled on “confidential” missions for the corporation. All the glamour of a king's messenger was his, only he didn't carry the Silver Greyhound: he was enough of a pup without other insignia.

And now the boy prepared to show the world—and his incredulous sister. Already the inevitable astonishment and admiration of Wall Street entranced him in advance. He was a sad dog. He gazed into the brown eyes of Mrs. Wyvern and knew he was as sad a dog as ever had been whelped on earth.

Now it happened, when travelling on one of his “confidential” missions—which were devised to keep him out of the way because he bored Mrs. Wyvern—the boy found himself in Charleston, South Carolina, where Mr. Welper awaited him.

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What Mr. Welper ever was about few people on earth knew; but he inhabited Charleston at that time, and the boy found him at the St. Charles Hotel and delivered a heavily sealed packet proudly. No doubt there were millions in securities in that envelope. It thrilled the boy to see Welper lock it in his satchel. It thrilled the boy still more to fish out a heavy automatic from the holster under his left arm-pit and lay it carelessly upon Mr. Welper's bureau.

"They'd be up against hell itself if they tried to pull anything on you, wouldn't they?" remarked Mr. Welper solemnly.

The boy attempted to look modest.

"Possibly," suggested Welper, "while I'm busy here you might like to stroll about town—m—m, yes—or see a moving picture——" He handed the boy a local newspaper.

With the weary and patronizing air of extremest sophistication the boy condescended to glance over the newspaper. He remarked that theatres bored him.

"There are some amusing auctions in the older part of town, if you are psychologically inclined," suggested Mr. Welper. "Man is, m—m, the proper study of man."

Psychology was the cant word of the hour.

"I'll stroll around that way," said the boy. In the back of his blond head his thoughts, being those of modern youth, were fixed upon a movie.

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In the crowd in which the boy was standing a friendly neighbour drawled gratuitous information to the effect that the house, the contents of which was being sold preparatory to demolition, "was one of the oldest houses in Charleston, suh."

Also the boy learned that here Governor Eden of evil fame, and of North Carolina, died of fright several hundred years previously.

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"What frightened him?" the boy inquired.

He was informed that Governor Eden had been in secret partnership with Stede Bonnet, the pirate; and that when Bonnet was finally caught the guilty Royal Governor, in terror of Bonnet's confession, fled to Charleston and died of sheer fright in this very house.

"The coward!" commented the boy, who never had known a guilty fear.

The auctioneer, in his soft, pleasant, Southern voice, continued to describe the contents of this ancient house as it was sold under the hammer, lot by lot.

A small but heavy leather box, garnished with strap hinges and nails of copper, was offered. According to the auctioneer, it bulged family papers; he urged it as a fine speculation for any collector of antique documents.

As there appeared to be no such collectors present the boy bid a dollar. A negro wanted the box for some unknown purpose and bid a dollar and a quarter.

At two dollars the boy got the box.

Why he bought it he did not quite understand, except that like all boys he had been interested in pirates; and the mention of Stede Bonnet revived the deathless appetite.

"Send it to me at the St. Charles Hotel," he said carelessly.

Then, having had enough of romantic antiquity, he started for reality and the nearest movie.

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That evening after dinner Mr. Welper wrote letters, and the boy went to the theatre.

Mr. Welper was still writing letters when the boy returned. Tired, ready for bed, he went into his room, which adjoined Mr. Welper's. But a boy, no matter how sleepy, welcomes any diversion that postpones that outrageous waste of time called sleep. As he stood yawning and undecided, his eye fell on the box which he had purchased at the auction.

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A large wrought-iron key was tied to one handle. With his penknife he cut it loose, unlocked the box, and gazed at the stacks of ancient documents within.

All were tied in pink tape. A musty odour filled the room. The boy seated himself on the carpet, still yawning, picked up a packet of ancient deeds, tossed them aside, glanced over a sheaf of letters, petitions, invoices, legal documents with waning interest. Then, of a sudden, his eye fell upon the signature of Stede Bonnet. Interest freshened; he read the letter with the conscious thrill that invades all boys even when in vaguest contact with great malefactors. He looked with awe upon the signature of Stede Bonnet, touched his finger to the faded ink, strove to realize that the hand which had penned this screed had been imbrued in human blood shivered agreeably.

The letter was written by Bonnet on board the sloop *Revenge* off the Virginia Capes to one Edward Teach, Esq., on board a ship called the *Man-o'-War*. It requested a rendezvous for the two ships off False Cape. Further, Bonnet informed Teach, he had obtained documents in Barbados which, if deciphered, might clear up the mystery of the ship *Red Moon*. But, he added, it would require the crew of the *Man-o'-War* as well as his own crew to salvage the cargo if, indeed, the location of the sunken ship could be discovered. Bonnet believed it lay in five fathoms somewhere off Tiger Island. The crews of the two ships could camp on Tiger Island, or, more comfortably, on the group of three islands west of False Cape and known as The Place of Swans.

The boy was wide awake now. Letter after letter he examined, untying and re-tying the faded yellowish packets. These letters and documents offered all sorts of information concerning events on the high seas two hundred years ago. Among other things the boy learned that Bonnet had hoisted the black flag and had taken the *Anne of Glasgow*; that the other name for Edward Teach, Esq., was "Blackbeard the Pirate"; and that Blackbeard had as ally a bloody scoundrel named Dick

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Hands, commanding a sister ship near Ocracoke Inlet, North Carolina.

And now the thrills that had swept the boy when he first read "Treasure Island" so long ago again stirred his blond and curly hair. He read of abominable cruelties, of treachery unspeakable, of savage reprisal, of robbery, of torture, of murder, of heartless mirth, of horrible excesses, carouses, mutiny, of pursuit, of escape by sea and land.

Hour after hour he sat there crosslegged on the carpet devouring the ancient records of wickedness; but, not until he came to the very last packet in the box, did he discover any further mention of the *Red Moon* galley.

"She has been missing," Bonnet wrote, "since the month of July in 1568, which is now more than a hundred and fifty years ago. But it is known that she sailed loaded from bilge to gunwales with pure, soft Indian gold. . . . Which knowledge, when imparted to me by Governor Eden," added poor Bonnet, "so inflamed me that, although I was an English gentleman with vast estates in the West Indies, and indeed was rich and everywhere respected, I could think of naught but this Spanish ship full of soft Indian gold.

"And now, Mr. Teach, I think my mind is crazed with the fierce flame of desire that devours me night and day. For such a man as I must be mad indeed to abandon estates, riches, and the approbation of honest men to take the sea for gold he hath no need of.

"Yet this, God help me, is what I have done in my sloop *Revenge*; and I am committed, for I have taken the *Anne of Glasgow*; and the black flag flies at my fore."

The other documents in the last packet were a paper and a parchment tied together.

The paper was grimly significant: in Governor Eden's hand was written:

"This parchment, if properly translated, should indicate the precise spot where the *Red Moon* galley sank in 1568."

Under this Seal Bonnet had written his name and:

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"Property of Governor Eden, who had it of the late Captain William Kidd."

Under this was written :

"Kidd is in hell, and Eden may go thither at his convenience. This document now belongs to Wm. Teach. Let him who hath a gamecock's gizzard come and take it !"

The boy sat with mouth open staring at a specimen of that kind of Truth which makes fiction tasteless.

Here between his fingers he had the terrible story as told by those who once enacted it ; he actually was touching a paper which had been touched by the reeking hands of Blackbeard ! Legendary pirates suddenly had become living creatures of to-day, leering at him out of the lamplight, telling their frightful tales for his ears alone—tales of blood and gold ! Again and again as in a trance he read the tragedy—strove to read between the brief, grim lines, to visualize, to comprehend.

And now, trembling, the boy unfolded the parchment which, these bloody men informed one another, contained the key to a sunken ship loaded to the gunwales with "pure, soft Indian gold !"

It was the strangest document he ever had gazed upon. Half of the parchment was covered with outlandish signs and symbols. Then there was a space ; then some writing in Spanish, done with ink perhaps, perhaps with blood.

The boy could neither decipher the strange and rather ghastly symbols, nor could he read Spanish.

For a long while he pored over the parchment, his eyes heavy now with sleep ; and at last he placed it on his dressing-table and laid him down to dreams of blood and gold.

When Mr. Welper came in the morning he found the boy still sleeping.

It was a habit of Mr. Welper to satisfy a perennial curiosity concerning other people's private business when opportunity offered.

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He was a soft-handed, soft-footed, short, stout gentleman with a sanctimonious face and voice. His hands and feet were so disproportionately small that they seemed almost dwarfed; but they were endlessly busy implements in Mr. Welper's service; and now his little feet trotted him soundlessly to the open box with its contents of yellow papers, and his little hands touched and pried and meddled and shuffled the documents, while at intervals his sly eyes fluttered towards the sleeping boy.

Presently Mr. Welper discovered the documents on the boy's dressing-table, he approached, and had been cautiously studying them for a minute or so when suddenly the boy sat up in bed.

Caught in the act, Mr. Welper was, always, efficient in any crisis.

"The wind," he explained, "blew these papers into the bathroom. Supposing that, m—m, they belong to you I entered your room to return them."

Some latent instinct stirred the boy to get out of bed and take the papers which Welper laid upon the dressing-table. He got back into bed still clutching them.

"Where," inquired Mr. Welper with gently jocose but paternal interest, "did you collect this ancient box of junk?"

"Oh, it's just worthless stuff," said the boy, reddening at the lie.

Mr. Welper stood motionless, a remote expression on his countenance.

"You had better dress and come to breakfast," he said absently. "We start back to New York this morning, and our train leaves at ten."

It was evident to the boy that Mr. Welper attached no importance to the documents.

All the way to New York Barney Welper was occupied in contriving a safe and sane way to possess himself

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of the documents which he had read sufficiently to realize that he wanted them.

But some blind, odd instinct led the boy to keep them upon his person night and day—not that it occurred to him to suspect Mr. Welper.

But if he had anything at all of tangible value in these papers, he had a fortune! And so vast a fortune that it made him almost uncomfortable and slightly giddy to try to calculate what a ship loaded to the gunwales with “soft, pure Indian gold” might be worth.

One thing in these pirate papers had instantly engaged the boy's attention—the mention of False Cape, Tiger Island, and Place-of-Swans. Because westward from False Cape and across the sea-dunes lay those vast inland fresh-water sounds and bays spreading through Virginia and North Carolina which he had known from earliest childhood. And Place-of-Swans was the valuable island property inherited by his sister and himself from a sportsman father; and which, for two months every year, had been the family's home in early winter.

Tiger Island was farther away—a place of no value for shooting, because for some reason neither duck, geese nor swans haunted the adjacent waters, nor ever had within the memory of living men.

To see False Cape and Place-of-Swans and Tiger Island mentioned by a bloody pirate in his own handwriting had thrilled a boy as he never before had thrilled.

Suppose—but it would be sheer madness to suppose that the *Red Moon* galley— And yet the boy understood that the first thing he meant to do on reaching New York was to sell enough stock in Orizava Oil to buy Tiger Island.

And now he began to recollect that in earliest childhood he had heard mention of the region as an ancient haunt of pirates. There was the almost forgotten nursery legend of False Cape, and of the aged horse wandering all alone over the wintry dunes with a lighted lantern tied loosely round his sagging neck . . .

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The boy now remembered that he had heard his father speak of an ocean inlet which once existed somewhere to the eastward, and which now had filled up with a solid mile-wide barrier of snow-white sand, barring the salt sea-water from the fresh. Recollection came flooding back to his mind. So the long hours in the train wore away, for the boy in the endless glamour of other days, in rosy dreams of a future treasure hunt; for Mr. Welper in mousy cogitation.

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When the boy, to his stupefaction, discovered that his shares in Orizava Oil were neither regarded as attractive collateral security by any financial institution, nor as saleable at any except ruinous figures, he went in terror to Mr. Welper.

In about six months, it transpired, the "inner interests" would be ready to start Orizava Oil sky-high. Until then, mum!—not a word, not the wink of an eyelash!

The boy, tremulous but comforted, resigned himself to wait the millions which were certain to be his.

Yet meanwhile there was Tiger Island. The State owned it, but offered it for sale. A few hogs pastured in the reeds and the gloomy pines of Tiger Island. There was no habitation on the snake-ridden place; for centuries it had been ownerless and common property for any who cared to pasture hogs or cut logs and float them to the mainland. Which latter enterprise was more of an effort than anybody ever had undertaken; and the pine woods were still primeval.

Finally, the State took title to Tiger Island; set arbitrarily, a ridiculously high figure on it, and offered it for sale, claiming that the purchaser could cut a quarter of a million dollars' worth of timber from the untouched woods.

The boy now suffered deadly fears that either some lumber interests would buy Tiger Island or that some-

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body's anchor might accidentally foul the wreck of the *Red Moon* and drag up golden relics which would start a gold craze and set the entire region wild.

Somehow or other the boy had to raise enough money to secure Tiger Island and the adjacent waters, worthless as far as wild fowl were concerned.

The boy's sister was still in Europe. He cabled her that he needed a hundred thousand dollars—without any other result than worrying his sister and starting a flight of admonitory letters. Then he wrote her and explained the matter in full; and his sister, thoroughly alarmed at what he had done in Orizava Oil, made preparations to terminate her delightful sojourn on the Riviera and return to New York, where, it was very evident, her youngest brother was attempting to make ducks and drakes of his inheritance.

And now the boy was becoming nervous and desperate, and he tried to borrow the money from Mr. Welper personally, without explaining why he wanted it, and was severely and piously chastened by that austere gentleman, who pointed out the enormity of anybody in the secret being treacherous enough to move a finger or stir an eyelash until the time set for starting an eruption of Orizava Oil as high as the volcano after which the corporation had been named.

The next week the boy's apartment was broken into and ransacked by burglars, who, oddly enough, burgled only the documents which the boy had bought at auction in Charleston.

The packet containing the parchment, however, was in the boy's safe-deposit box—or, rather, in two separate boxes in different banks. For the boy, supposing that the Spanish inscription was a translation of the hieroglyphics, had torn the parchment in two, thinking it safer to separate the duplicate inscriptions in case of any accident to either.

Nevertheless, the affair alarmed the youngster fearfully, though he never dreamed of connecting Mr. Welper

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with such a thing—a gentleman he so frankly admired, revered, feared. But the stupidity of burglars who made off with antique documents exasperated him. Such papers loose in the world might start clever minds in the direction of Tiger Island.

One day, almost beside himself with anxiety, the boy took from one of the safe-deposit boxes the cherished papers and went to the offices of Orizava Oil, determined to show Mr. Welper everything and offer him a partnership for money enough to start the enterprise.

Mr. Welper was not in his own private lair, but the boy walked in, all white and desperate, and saw the private safe of Mr. Welper wide open, yawning in his very face. Like a little bird hypnotized by the wide jaws of a deadly snake, the boy moved irresistibly towards the open safe.

Good heavens! Here was plenty; and to spare—packets of Treasury notes, securities instantly marketable, bonds better than bars of gold. His half-swooning mind was trying to co-ordinate robbery with the fact that, in six months he would be worth millions who to-day hadn't a thousand dollars in the bank. He took a hundred thousand dollars in Treasury notes and securities. He placed the packets in his breast pocket, turned, walked out into the hall to the elevator.

The cars flashed up and down. He had not rung. He waited. But when at length a car stopped at the landing where he stood he let it go on without him. And after a long while the boy turned as though dazed and started unsteadily back towards the offices of Orizava Oil, and met Mr. Welper coming out. The latter looked at him with sly, keen eyes veiled by heavy lashes.

"I'm just leaving—if you've come to see me. A very important matter?"

The boy now realized the private safe of Mr. Welper was closed. He turned deathly pale.

"Is anybody there?" he managed to ask.

"Nobody now, except Mrs. Wyvern. Why?"

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A last straw!—the only woman who ever had understood him!

"I'll come back if—m—m—if I can be of any service," purred Welper. . . . "Are you sick?"

"N-no."

"You look like a ghost, my son. Probably—ah—undoubtedly you are up late. M—m, yes; but youth!—ah, youth! Well, I must hasten. So—m—m, ah, *good* day to you, my son."

The boy went slowly back to the offices of Orizava Oil and straight into Mr. Welper's lair. The safe was closed.

Now more slowly still he walked through the pretentious suite, noticing nobody until he came to the private retreat of the only woman who ever had understood him. She was busy at her desk, looked up at him annoyed, but smoothed her features instinctively. For even a fool of a boy *might* make mischief within the next few months if treated with too open contempt.

"Sit down, Jimmy," she said sweetly. "What is the trouble?"

"Trouble—trouble!" he stammered. "I can't tell you; and I've got to." His face had become scarlet, and there were tears in his eyes.

"Helen," he whispered, "you won't understand—you who are so chaste, so pure, so untempted." He choked. And she looked at him tenderly, considering him a fool and an unmitigated nuisance.

"What is the trouble, Jim; a——"—she smiled archly—"a love affair?"

"Oh, Helen!—when I am in love with the very ground you walk on!"

His voice had a little of the bleat about it, which perhaps was natural in a case of calf love, and it unutterably annoyed Mrs. Wyvern, who had no desire to be made ridiculous within hearing of the stenographers in the next office.

Had the little ass blabbed? Had he consulted an attorney concerning his investments in Orizava Oil?

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Contempt for him reassured her; but instinct, stirring obscurely in feminine depths, awoke prudence. It was hard for her to play her part; but she was a thrifty and cautious woman, so she suppressed her temper and, rising, led the human calf to an inner room where was a dictagraph and a sofa.

For a while he sobbed on her shoulder.

"Helen," he managed to say at last, "I'm disgraced. I can't tell you—looking into your pure eyes—wh-what the man who loves you really is——"

"Tell me, dear."

Hunched up beside her on the sofa, the boy began the hysterical confession which was destined to put a quietus upon him and his asininity for a while. He told her about the discovery of the parchment, of his dire necessity for money with which to buy Tiger Island, of his attempts to raise it. He fished out his corroborative documents and laid them on her lap. Half of the parchment was missing—the Spanish part—because he had been too much in a hurry to go to both banks.

Mrs. Wyvern's brown eyes had now become magnificently brilliant. She examined the documents; read the statement he showed her.

"But," she inquired, mystified, "where is the disgrace in all this, Jim?"

"Wait," he said in a choking voice. Then, as she caressed his clumsy boy's fingers, this embryo ass pronounced his valedictory:

"Helen, try to be merciful and find it in your heart to forgive the man who loves you, and who confesses his degradation at your feet. I have been weak enough to take from Mr. Welper's safe notes and securities valued at a hundred thousand dollars. I am a common thief."

And then he pulled the stolen securities and money from his overcoat, and laid them in her lap.

Mrs. Wyvern really was dumb with amazement. This little whipper-snapper, this sentimental little ass had had the courage to do that!

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She looked at the packet, at the parchment covered with hieroglyphics, and now anger began to redden her cheeks, and she might have struck him had she not remembered the dictagraph.

In a flash she knew exactly what was to be done and how to do it. She drew the boy to her and gently kissed his forehead, sat patiently while the storm burst, and swept his miserable young soul cleaner of vanity than it had been for many a month.

"You—you have the combination of Mr. Wel-el-per's safe," he sobbed; "put the money back, and ne will never know how low I sank. I—I thought I could be a thief; but it wasn't in me—and I couldn't do it—I couldn't do it——"

Mrs. Wyvern could cheerfully have pushed a knife in him. She wore one in a satin sheath attached to her right garter.

"There, there," she said soothingly, "there, there. Now go home and forget it. It's all over, Jimmy."

"B-but——"

"No, it hasn't made any difference with me. Your behaviour was noble. There is no other word. You remember—there is more rejoicing in Heaven—you recollect?—something about the ninety and nine——"

"Oh, Helen!"

"Go home and leave it all to me."

He went, at last.

Meanwhile Mr. Welper had returned. After the boy had left he came into Mrs. Wyvern's office. She appeared from the inner room.

"What was the matter with that fool boy, Nell?" he inquired.

She told him exactly. She went over every incident with precision. She handed him the stolen securities; she showed him the documents concerning Tiger Island, letters, parchment—everything. Then they listened to the boy's confession recorded on the dictagraph.

After a little while: "I think," said Mr. Welper softly,

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"that this is going to be easy—very easy, and, m—m, remunerative. Yes, I think so."

"I think so too," smiled Mrs. Wyvern, delighted to be rid of the boy for ever.

Then both of them, still smiling, put their heads together to sketch out the last act of the farce in which the boy had played the clown too long.

"Why not finish at once?" said Mrs. Wyvern. She rose, opened her safe, tossed in Mr. Welper's securities and the boy's documents. Then she closed and locked the safe.

"Very well, call him on the telephone. He's home by this time, I suppose," the man agreed.

Mrs. Wyvern called; the boy answered tearfully, and promised to return at once.

"I'll have to go to the Forty Club and try to decipher these hieroglyphics," said Mr. Welper.

"Do you think you can?"

"We are supposed to have every facility in our library for solving any cipher ever known," remarked Mr. Welper. "I ought to do it in a week."

"Why not take it to the museum of inscriptions?"

"Why call in anybody unless I'm obliged to?" inquired Welper slyly.

"Meanwhile you had better take a flyer and buy Tiger Island," suggested pretty Mrs. Wyvern. "Fifty-fifty, you know. I *might* have kept it for myself, Barney."

Welper hesitated, ventured a cautious glance, understood that he was at her mercy.

"Certainly, my dear," he purred, "fifty-fifty was what I meant to offer."

Both smiled again. But their expressions altered immediately as the boy entered and stood stock still at sight of Welper.

"Where are the Treasury notes and securities you stole from my safe?" asked Mr. Welper coldly.

The boy stared at him horrified, then went white as death and turned to Mrs. Wyvern.

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"I gave them to you," he said in a ghastly voice.

"You did not," she said calmly.

After a terrible silence: "Good heavens," he gasped, "am I going crazy!"

"No," said the woman; "you've always been a fool, and now you're a thief"; and to Welper: "You tell him where he gets off, Barney. And if he pulls any yarn about making restitution to *me*, tell him to get his witnessses or we'll turn his dictagraph story over to the police."

Mrs. Wyvern rose leisurely and walked out of the office by another door, leaving the boy half fainting, leaning against the wall, and Mr. Welper slyly watching him.

The latter broke the frightful silence harshly.

"Where's *that* hundred thousand? You dirty thief!"

At the word the boy suddenly understood the entire and horrible duplicity. He made a movement towards his left arm, and Mr. Welper's pistol muzzle dented his stomach.

Then the older man relieved the boy of his weapon.

"Now," he said, "you listen. You go to prison. Understand! I've got it on you; and I've got my witness, and your finger-prints on my safe and on the packets. And I'm going to see that they railroad you, my young buck, and you'll do your stretch and disgrace your family for ever. Now get out. You're just *one jump* ahead of the cops. And if you show that boob mug anywhere you can kiss yourself good-bye—one way or another. Beat it!"

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After a night of such agony as he never dreamed could be, even in hell, the boy was terrified by a ring at his door-bell. But it was only a messenger with a wireless dispatch from his sister in mid-ocean, whose steamer, she warned him, would dock in four days.

Haggard, half dead from the shock of it all, almost crazed by his ruin and threatened disgrace, he packed a

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suit-case and sat down to write a letter to his sister. He was shaking all over. Had Welper not taken his pistol away he probably would have committed the supreme fool act.

Very shakily and painfully the boy wrote out the circumstances of his connexion with Orizava Oil from the beginning. He ended with the fear expressed that it was a gigantic swindle and that his money was gone for ever. Then, forcing his flagging hand, he wrote out the history of his love for Mrs. Wyvern, and how it had ended. And last of all he told her about the Bonnet-Eden-Teach documents, the parchment covered with South American symbols, his attempt to raise money to buy Tiger Island, his temptation, disgrace; the restitution, and how utterly he had put himself into the hands of this woman and this man who now were about to hand him over to the police.

"Sis," he continued, "I've been a fool. I can't face the disgrace. I can't disgrace you. I'm ruined—utterly. They mean to send me to prison. They have sufficient evidence.

"There's only one way out of it to save the family name. I'm going to Place-of-Swans. You will get a telegram by Thursday from old Jake, saying I've had a bad accident with a shot-gun. I'll be dead, Sis darling. It's the only way. You'll find this letter at your bank waiting for you. I enclose our safe-deposit key. The half of the parchment which Welper did not steal is in the box at the Imperial Trust Company, which you and I rent together. If the paper is of value turn it over to your lawyer and try to get hold of Tiger Island before Welper buys it. I firmly believe it is worth millions. Good-bye, dear sister. Forgive me for being a fool. I wasn't a thief; I did give back everything, no matter what they say.

YOUR UNHAPPY BROTHER."

Three days later, when the boy's sister landed, a telegram awaited her to say that her only brother had been drowned off Tiger Island by the capsizing of his sail-boat.