# GRACE ALFRED AUGUSTUS

## THE TALE OF TIMBER TOWN

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# Содержание

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Carlyle Smythe, in his interesting reminiscences of Mark Twain, printed in *Life*, says that, of all the stories which interested the great American writer while travelling with him through Australasia, the tragical story which is the basis of "The Tale of Timber Town" fascinated the celebrated author more than any other. The version which Mark Twain read was the re-print of the verbatim report of the most remarkable trial ever held in New Zealand, and perhaps south of the Line, and there is no cause for wonder in his interest. I, too, have studied and re-studied that narrative, with its absorbing psychological and sociological problems; I have interrogated persons who knew the chief characters in the story; I have studied the locality, and know intimately the scene of the tragedy: and even though "The Tale of Timber Town" has in the writing taxed my energies for many a month, I have by no means exhausted the theme which so enthralled Mark Twain.

I have tried to reproduce the characters and atmosphere of those stirring days, when £1,000,000 worth of gold was brought into Timber Town in nine months; and I have sought to reproduce

the characters and atmosphere of Timber Town, rather than to resuscitate the harrowing details of a dreadful crime. I have tried to show how it was possible for such a tragedy to take place, as was that which so absorbed Mark Twain, and why it was that the tale stirred in him an interest which somewhat surprised Carlyle Smythe.

Here in Timber Town I met them – the unassuming celebrity, and the young *entrepreneur*. The great humorist, alack! will never read the tale as I have told it, but I am hopeful, that in "The Tale of Timber Town," his erstwhile companion and the public will perceive the literary value of the theme which arrested the attention of so great a writer as Mark Twain.

"The Tale of Timber Town" first appeared in the pages of *The Otago Witness*, whose proprietors I desire to thank for introducing the story to the public, and for the courtesy of permitting me to reserve the right of reproduction of the work in book-form.

*Timber Town.* A.A.G.

# PROEM

Timber Town lay like a toy city at the bottom of a basin. Its wooden houses, each placed neatly in the middle of a little garden-plot, had been painted brightly for the delight of the children. There were whole streets of wooden shops, with verandahs in front of them to shade the real imported goods in their windows; and three wooden churches, freshly painted to suit the tastes of their respective – and respectable – congregations; there was a wooden Town Hall, painted grey; a wooden Post Office, painted brown; a red college, where boys in white disported upon a green field; a fawn-coloured school, with a playground full of pinafored little girls; and a Red Tape Office – designed in true Elizabethan style, with cupolas, vanes, fantastic chimney-tops, embayed windows, wondrous parapets – built entirely of wood and painted the colour of Devonshire cream, with grit in the paint to make it look like stone.

Along the streets ran a toy tram, pulled by a single horse, which was driven by a man who moved his arms just as if they were real, and who puffed genuine clouds of smoke from his tobacco-pipe. Ladies dressed in bright colours walked up and down the trim side-paths, with gaudy sunshades in their hands; knocked at doors, went calling, and looked into the shop windows, just like actual people.

It was the game of playing at living. The sky shone brightly

overhead; around the town stood hills which no romantic scene-painter could have bettered; the air of the man with water-cart, of the auctioneer's man with bell, and of the people popping in and out of the shops, was the air of those who did these things for love of play-acting on a stage.

As a matter of fact, there was nothing to worry about, in Timber Town; no ragged beggars, no yelling hawkers, no sad-eyed, care-worn people, no thought for to-morrow. The chimneys smoked for breakfast regularly at eight o'clock every morning; the play of living began at nine, when the smiling folk met in the streets and turned, the men into their offices to play at business, the women into the shops where meat and good things to eat were to be had for little more than love. Between twelve and two o'clock everybody went home to dinner, and the cabs which stood in front of the wooden Post Office, and dogs which slept on the pavement beneath the verandahs, held possession of the streets.

But if anyone would see the beauty and fashion of Timber Town, from four to five in the afternoon was the hour. Then wives and daughters, having finished playing at house-keeping for the day, put on their gayest costumes, and visited the milliners. Southern Cross Street buzzed with gaudy life; pretty women bowed, and polite men raised their hats – just as people do in real cities – but, as everybody knew everybody else, the bowing and hat-raising were general, just as they are when the leading lady comes into the presence of the chorus on the stage. Then

the vision of gossiping, smiling humanity would pass away – the shops put up their shutters at six o'clock; the game was over for the day, and all the chimneys smoked for tea.

Timber Town by night, except when the full moon shone, was sombre, with nothing doing. The street lamps burnt but indifferent gas; people stayed indoors, and read the piquant paragraphs of *The Pioneer Bushman*, Timber Town's evening journal, or fashioned those gay dresses which by day helped to make the town so bright, and went to bed early and slept with a soundness and tranquillity, well-earned by the labour of playing so quaintly at the game of life.

The hills which surrounded the little town pressed so closely upon it, that by sheer weight they seemed likely to crush its frail houses into matchwood. On one side mountains, some bare and rugged, some clothed with forest, rose behind the foot-hills, and behind them more mountains, which seemed to rise like the great green billows of an angry sea. On one side stretched the blue of the distant forest-covered ranges, upon the other the azure of the encroaching ocean, which, finding a way between the encircling hills, insinuated its creeping tides into the town itself. And overhead spread the blue sky, for the sky above Timber Town was blue nine days out of ten, and the clouds, when they came, performed their gloomy mission quickly and dispersed with despatch, that the sun might smile again and the playing of the people continue.

No nest in the forest was ever more securely hid than was

Timber Town from the outside world. Secreted at the end of a deep bay, that bay was itself screened from the ocean outside by an extensive island and a sandspit which stretched for many a mile.

Inaccessible by land, the little town was reached only by water, and there, in that quiet eddy of the great ocean, lived its quiet, quaint, unique existence.

In such a place men's characters develop along their own lines, and, lacking that process of mental trituration which goes on in large cities where many minds meet, they frequently attain an interesting if strange maturity. In such a community there is opportunity for the contemplation of mankind ignorant of poverty; and such a happy state, begotten of plenty and nurtured by freedom, has its natural expression in the demeanour of the people. It was not characteristic of Timber Town to hoard, but rather to spend. In a climate bright through the whole year, it was not natural that the sorrows of life, where life was one long game, should press heavily upon the players.

But we come upon the little timber town at a time of transition from sequestered peace to the roar and rush of a mining boom, and if the stirring events of that time seem to change the tranquil aspect of the scene, it is only that a breeze of life from outside sweeps over its surface, as when a gust of wind, rushing from high mountains upon some quiet lake nestling at their feet, stirs the placid waters into foam.

So through the wild scene, when the villain comes upon the

stage and the hidden treasure is brought to light, though the play may seem to lose its pastoral character, it is to be remembered that if tragedy may endure for the night, comedy comes surely enough in the morning.

# CHAPTER I

## The Master-Goldsmith

Jake Ruggles leant over the goldsmith's bench, put the end of his blow-pipe into the gas-flame, and impinged a little oxygenized jet upon the silver buckle he was soldering. He was a thin, undersized, rabbit-faced youth, whose head was thatched with a shock of coarse black hair. He possessed a pair of spreading black eyebrows upon a forehead which was white when well washed, for Nature had done honestly by the top of his head, but had realised, when his chin was reached, the fatuity of spending more time upon the moulding and adornment of the person of Jake Ruggles.

The master-goldsmith was a rubicund man, with a face which Jake, in a rage, had once described as that of "a pig with the measles." But this was, without doubt, a gross perversion of the truth. Benjamin Tresco's countenance was as benign as that of Bacchus, and as open as the day. Its chief peculiarity was that the brow and lashes of one eye were white, while piebald patches adorned his otherwise red head.

In his own eyes, the most important person in Timber Town was Benjamin Tresco. But it was natural for him to think so,

for he was the only man of his trade in a town of six thousand people. He was a portly person who took a broad view of life, and it was his habit to remark, when folk commented on his rotundity, "I *am* big. I don't deny it. But I can't help myself – God A'mighty made me big, big in body, big in brain, big in appetite, big in desire to break every established law and accepted custom; but I am prevented from giving rein to my impulses by the expansiveness of my soul. That I developed myself. I could go up the street and rob the Kangaroo Bank; I could go to Mr. Crewe, the millionaire, and compel him at the pistol's mouth to transfer me the hoards of his life-time; I could get blazing drunk three nights a week; I could kidnap Varnhagen's pretty daughter, and carry her off to the mountains; but my soul prevents me – I am the battle-ground of contending passions. One half of me says, 'Benjamin, do these things'; the other half says, 'Tresco, abstain. Be magnanimous: spare them!' My appetites – and they are enormous – say, 'Benjamin Tresco, have a real good time while you can; sail in, an' catch a-holt of pleasure with both hands.' But my better part says, 'Take your pleasure in mutual enjoyments, Benjamin; fix your mind on book-learning and the elevating Arts of peace.' I am a bone of contention between Virtue and License, an' the Devil only knows which will get me in the end."

But at the time of introduction he was quietly engraving a little plate of gold, which was destined to adorn the watch-chain of the Mayor, who, after Mr. Crewe, was Timber Town's most opulent

citizen.

When the craftsman engraves, he fastens his plate of gold to the end of a piece of wood, long enough to be held conveniently in the hand, and as thick as the width of the precious metal. This he holds in his left hand, and in his right the graver with which he nicks out little pieces of gold according to design, which pieces fall into the apron of the bench – and, behold! he is engraving. The work needs contemplation, concentration, and attention; for every good goldsmith carries the details of the design in his head. But, that morning, there seemed to be none of these qualities in Benjamin Tresco. He dropped his work with a suddenness that endangered its fastenings of pitch, rapped the bench with the round butt of his graver, and glared ferociously at Jake Ruggles.

"What ha' you got there?" he asked fiercely of his apprentice, who sat with him at the bench and was now working industriously with a blow-pipe upon the hoop of a gold ring. "Who told you to stop soldering the buckles?"

Jake turned his head sideways and looked at his master, like a ferret examining an angry terrier; alert, deliberate, and full of resource.

"It's a bit of a ring I was give to mend," he replied, "up at The Lucky Digger."

Tresco stretched out a long arm, and took the gem. Then he drew a deep breath.

"You've begun early, young man," he exclaimed. "Would you poach on my preserves? The young lady whose finger that ring

adorns I am wont to regard as my especial property, an' a half-fledged young *pukeko*, like you, presumes to cut me out! *You* mend that lady's trinkets? *You* lean over a bar, an' court beauty adorned in the latest fashion? *You* make love to my 'piece' by fixing up her jewels? Young man, you've begun too early. Now, look-a-here, I shall do this job myself – for love – I shall deliver this ring with my own hand." Tresco chuckled softly, and Jake laughed out loud.

The scene had been a piece of play-acting. The apprentice, who knew his master's weakness for the pretty bar-maid at The Lucky Digger was, as he expressed himself, "taking a rise out of the boss," and Tresco's simulated wrath was the crisis for which he had schemed. Between the two there existed a queer comradeship, which had been growing for more than two years, so that the bald, rotund, red-faced goldsmith had come to regard the shock-headed, rat-faced apprentice more as a son than as an assistant; whilst Jake would say to the youth of his "push," "Huh! none o' yer bashin' an' knockin' about fer me – the boss an' me's chums. Huh! you should be in *my* boots – we have our pint between us reg'lar at eleven, just like pals."

Picking up the ring with a pair of tweezers, the master-jeweller first examined its stone – a diamond – through a powerful lens. Next, with a small feather he took up some little bits of chopped gold from where they lay mixed with borax and water upon a piece of slate; these he placed deftly where the gold hoop was weak; over the top of them he laid a delicate

slip of gold, and bound the whole together with wire as thin as thread. This done, he put the jewel upon a piece of charred wood, thrust the end of his blow-pipe into the flame of the gas-burner, which he pulled towards him, and with three or four gentle puffs through the pipe the mend was made. The goldsmith threw the ring in the "pickle," a green, deadly-looking chemical in an earthenware pot upon the floor.

Tresco was what the doctors call "a man of full habit." He ate largely, drank deeply, slept heavily, but, alas! he was a bachelor. There was no comfortable woman in the room at the back of his workshop to call in sweet falsetto, "Benjamin, come to dinner! Come at once: the steak's getting cold!" As he used to say, "This my domicile lacks the female touch – there's too much tobacco-ashes an' cobwebs about it: the women seem kind o' scared to come near, as if I might turn out to be a dog that bites."

The ring being pickled, Benjamin fished it out of the green liquid and washed it in a bowl of clean water. A little filing and scraping, a little rubbing with emery-paper, and the goldsmith burnished the yellow circlet till it shone bright and new.

"Who knows?" he exclaimed, holding up the glistening gem, "who knows but it is the ring of the future Mrs. T.? Lord love her, I have forty-eight pairs of socks full of holes, all washed and put away, waiting for her to darn. Think of the domestic comfort of nearly fifty pairs of newly-darned socks; with her sitting, stitching, on one side of the fire, and saying, 'Benjamin, these ready-made socks are no good: *I* must knit them for you

in future,' and me, on the other side, smiling like a Cheshire cat with pure delight, and saying: 'Annie, my dear, you're an angel compacted of comfort and kindness: my love, would you pass me a paper-light, *if* you please?' But in the meantime the bird must be caught. I go to catch it."

He slipped his dirty apron over his head, put on his coat and weather-beaten hat of strange outlandish shape, placed the ring in a dainty, silk-lined case, and sallied forth into the street.

Timber Town burst on his benignant gaze. Over against him stood a great wooden shop, painted brilliant blue; along the street was another, of bright red; but most of the buildings were a sober stone-colour or some shade of modest grey or brown. One side of the street was verandah'd along its whole length, and the walks on either side of the macadamised road were asphalted. Benjamin, wearing the air of Bacchus courting the morning, walked a hundred yards or so, till he came to the centre of the town, where four streets met. At one corner stood the Kangaroo Bank; at another a big clothing-shop; at the two others Timber Town's rival hostelries – The Bushman's Tavern and The Lucky Digger. The Bank and hotels, conspicuous amid the other buildings, had no verandahs in front of them, but each was freshly painted; the Bushman's Tavern a slate-blue, The Lucky Digger a duck-egg green.

The sun was hot; the iron on the roofs ticked in the heat and reflected the rays of heaven. Benjamin paused on the edge of the pavement, mopped his perspiring brow, and contemplated the

garish scene. Opposite the wooden Post Office, which flanked the "clothing emporium," stretched a rank of the most outlandish vehicles that ever came within the category of cabs licensed to carry passengers. Some were barouches which must have been ancient when Victoria was crowned, and concerning which there was a legend that they came out to the settlement in the first ships, in 1842; others were landaus, constructed on lines substantial enough to resist collision with an armoured train; but the majority were built on a strange American plan, with a canopy of dingy leather and a step behind, so that the fare, after progressing sideways like a crab, descended, at his journey's end, as does a burglar from "Black Maria."

Along the footpaths walked, in a leisurely manner, a goodly sprinkling of Timber Town's citizens, with never a ragged figure among them.

Perhaps the seediest-looking citizen "on the block" was Tresco himself, but what he lacked in tailoring he made good in serene benignity of countenance. His features, which beamed like the sun shining above him, were recognised by all who passed by. It was, "How do, Benjamin; bobbin' up, old party?" "Mornin', Tresco. You remind me of the rooster that found the jewel – you look so bloomin' contented with yourself." "Ah! good day, Mr. Tresco. I hope I see you well. Remember, I still have that nice little bit of property for sale. Take you to see it any time you like."

With Benjamin it was, "How do, Ginger? In a hurry? Go it

– you'll race the hands round the clock yet." "Good morning, Mr. Flint. Lovely weather, yes, but hot. Now, half-a-pint is refreshing, but you lawyers have no time – too many mortgages, conveyances, bills of sale to think about. I understand. Good morning." "Why, certainly, Boscoe, my beloved pal. Did you say 'half'? – I care not if it's a pint. Let us to the blushing Hebe of the bar."

Tresco and his friend, Boscoe, entered the portals of The Lucky Digger. Behind the bar stood a majestic figure arrayed in purple and fine linen. She had the development of an Amazon and the fresh face of a girl from the shires of England. Through the down on her cheek "red as a rose was she."

Tresco advanced as to the shrine of a goddess, and leant deferentially over the bar. Never a word spoke he till the resplendent deity had finished speaking to two commercial travellers who smoked cigars, and then, as her eyes met his, he said simply, "Two pints, if you please, miss."

The liquor fell frothing into two tankards; Boscoe put down the money, and the goddess withdrew to the society of the bagmen, who talked to her confidentially, as to their own familiar friend.

Tresco eyed the group, smilingly, and said, "The toffs are in the cheese, Boscoe. You'd think they'd a monopoly of Gentle Annie. But wait till I get on the job."

Boscoe, a wizened little tinsmith, with the grime of his trade upon him, looked vacuously to his front, and buried his nose in

his pot of beer.

"Flash wimmen an't in my line," said he, as he smacked his lips, "not but this yer an't a fine 'piece.' But she'd cost a gold mine in clo'es alone, let alone brooches and fallals. I couldn't never run it." Here one of the gaudy bagmen stretched out his hand, and fingered the bar-maid's rings. The girl seemed nothing annoyed at this awkward attention, but when her admirer's fingers stole to her creamy chin, she stepped back, drew herself up with infinite dignity, and said with perfect enunciation, "Well, you *have* got an impudence. I must go and wash my face."

She was about to leave the bar, when Tresco called after her, "My dear, one minute." From his pocket he drew the dainty ring-case, and held it out to the girl, who took it eagerly. In a moment the gem was on her finger. "You dear old bag of tricks!" she exclaimed. "Is it for me?"

"Most certainly," said Benjamin. "One moment." He took the ring between his forefinger and thumb, as if he were a conjurer about to perform, glanced triumphantly round the bar-room, held the girl's hand gallantly in his, deliberately replaced the ring on her finger, and said, "With this ring I thee wed; with my body I thee worship; with all my worldly goods I thee endow."

"Thanks, I'll take the ring," retorted the bar-maid, with mock annoyance and a toss of her head, "but, really, I can't be bothered with your old carcase."

"Pleasing delusion," said Tresco, unruffled. "It's your own ring!"

A close, quick scrutiny, and the girl had recognised her refurbished jewel.

"You bald-headed rogue!" she exclaimed. But Tresco had vanished, and nothing but his laugh came back through the swinging glass-door.

The bagmen laughed too. But Gentle Annie regarded them indignantly, and in scornful silence, which she broke to say, "And *now* I shall go and wash my face."

# CHAPTER II

## The Wreck of the Mersey Witch

The Maori is a brown man. His hair is straight, coarse, black, and bright as jet. His eyes are brown, his teeth are pearly white; and, when he smiles, those brown eyes sparkle and those white teeth gleam. A Maori's smile is one of Nature's most complete creations.

But as Enoko poked his head out of the door of the hut, his face did not display merriment. Day was breaking; yet he could see nothing but the flying scud and the dim outline of the shore; he could hear nothing but the roar of the breakers, battering the boulders of the beach.

He came out of the hut, his teeth chattering with the rawness of the morning; and made a general survey of the scene.

"It's too cold," he muttered in his own language. "There's too much wind, too much sea."

With another look at the angry breakers, he went back into the hut. "Tahuna," he cried, "there's no fishing to-day – the weather's bad."

Tahuna stirred under his blankets, sat up, and said in Maori, "I'll come and look for myself."

The two men went out into the cold morning air.

"No," said Tahuna, "it's no good – there's a north-east gale. We had better go back to the *pa* when the day has well dawned."

The words were hardly out of his mouth, when a sudden veering of the wind drew the scud from the sea and confined it to the crest of the rocky, wooded cliff under which the Maoris stood. The sea lay exposed, grey and foaming; but it was not on the sea that the men's eyes were riveted. There, in the roaring, rushing tide, a ship lay helpless on the rocks.

Enoko peered, as though he mistrusted the sight of his eye – he had but one. Tahuna ran to the hut, and called, "Come out, both of you. There's a ship on the rocks!"

From the hut issued two sleepy female forms, the one that of the chief's wife, the other that of a pretty girl. The former was a typical Maori *wahine* of the better class, with regular features and an abundance of long black hair; the latter was not more than eighteen years old, of a lighter complexion, full-figured, and with a good-natured face which expressed grief and anxiety in every feature. "Oh!" she exclaimed, as a great wave broke over the helpless ship, "the sailors will be drowned. What can we do?"

"Amiria," said the chief to her, "go back to the *pa*, and tell the people to come and help. We three," – he pointed to his wife, Enoko and himself – "will see what we can do."

"No," replied the girl, "I can swim as well as any of you. I shall stay, and help." She ran along the beach to the point nearest the wreck, and the others followed her.

Tahuna, standing in the wash of the sea, cried out, "A rope! A rope! A rope!" But his voice did not penetrate ten yards into the face of the gale.

Then all four, drenched with spray, shouted together, and with a similar result.

"If they could float a rope ashore," said the chief, "we would make it fast, and so save them."

The vessel lay outside a big reef which stretched between her and the shore; her hull was almost hidden by the surf which broke over her, the only dry place on her being the fore-top, which was crowded with sailors; and it was evident that she must soon break up under the battering seas which swept over her continually.

"They can't swim," said the chief, with a gesture of disgust. "The *pakeha* is a sheep, in the water. *We* must go to *them*. Now, remember: when you get near the ship, call out for a rope. We can drift back easily enough."

He walked seawards till the surf was up to his knees. The others followed his example; the girl standing with the other woman between the men.

"Now," cried Tahuna, as a great breaker retired; and the four Maoris rushed forward, and plunged into the surf. But the force of the next wave dashed them back upon the beach. Three times they tried to strike out from the shore, but each time they were washed back. Tahuna's face was bleeding, Enoko limped as he rose to make the fourth attempt, but the women had so far escaped unscathed.

"When the wave goes out," cried the chief, "rush forward, and grasp the rocks at the bottom. Then when the big wave passes, swim a few strokes, dive when the next comes, and take hold of the rocks again."

"That's a good plan," said Enoko. "Let us try it."

A great sea broke on the shore; they all rushed forward, and disappeared as the next wave came. Almost immediately their black heads were bobbing on the water. There came another great breaker, the four heads disappeared; the wave swept over the spot where they had dived, but bore no struggling brown bodies with it. Then again, but further out to sea, the black heads appeared, to sink again before the next great wave. Strong in nerve, powerful in limb were those amphibious Maoris, accustomed to the water from the year of their birth.

They were now fifty yards from the shore, and swam independently of one another; diving but seldom, and bravely breasting the waves.

The perishing sailors, who eagerly watched the swimmers, raised a shout, which gave the Maoris new courage.

Between the Natives and the ship stretched a white line of foam, hissing, roaring, boiling over a black reef which it was impossible to cross. The tired swimmers, therefore, had to make a painful detour. Slowly Tahuna and Enoko, who were in front, directed their course towards a channel at one end of the reef, and the women followed in their wake. They were swimming on their sides, but all their strength and skill seemed of little avail

in bringing them any nearer to their goal. But suddenly Amiria dived beneath the great billows, and when her tangled, wet mane reappeared, she was in front of the men. They and the chief's wife followed her example, and soon all four swimmers had passed through the channel. Outside another reef lay parallel to the first, and on it lay the stranded ship, fixed and fast, with the green seas pounding her to pieces.

When the Maoris were some fifty yards from the wreck, they spread themselves out in a line parallel to the reef on which lay the ship, her copper plates exposed half-way to the keel. "Rope! Rope! Rope!" shouted the Maoris. Their voices barely reached the ship, but the sailors well knew for what the swimmers risked their lives. Already a man had unrove the fore-signal-halyards, the sailors raised a shout and the coiled rope was thrown. It fell midway between Tahuna and Enoko, where Amiria was swimming. Quickly the brave girl grasped the life-line, and it was not long before her companions were beside her.

They now swam towards the channel. Once in the middle of that, they turned on their backs and floated, each holding tight to the rope, and the waves bearing them towards the shore.

The return passage took only a few minutes, but to get through the breakers which whitened the beach with foam was a matter of life or death to the swimmers. They were grasped by the great seas and were hurled upon the grinding boulders; they were sucked back by the receding tide, to be again thrown upon the shore.

Tahuna was the first to scramble out of the surf, though he limped as he walked above high-water-mark. Amiria lay exhausted on the very margin, the shallow surge sweeping over her; but the rope was still in her hand. The chief first carried the girl up the beach, and laid her, panting, on the stones; then he went back to look for the others. His wife, with wonderful fortune, was carried uninjured to his very feet, but Enoko was struggling in the back-wash which was drawing him into a great oncoming sea. Forgetting his maimed foot, the chief sprang towards his friend, seized hold of him and a boulder simultaneously, and let the coming wave pass over him and break upon the beach. Just as it retired, he picked up Enoko, and staggered ashore with his helpless burden.

For five minutes they all lay, panting and still. Then Amiria got up and hauled on the life-line. Behind her a strange piece of rock, shaped like a roughly-squared pillar, stood upright from the beach. To this she made fast the line, on which she pulled hard and strong. Tahuna rose, and helped her, and soon out of the surf there came a two-inch rope which had been tied to the signal-halyards.

When the chief and the girl had fixed the thicker rope round the rock, Tahuna tied the end of the life-line about his waist, walked to the edge of the sea, and held up his hand.

That was a signal for the first man to leave the ship. He would have to come hand-over-hand along the rope, through the waters that boiled over the deadly rocks, and through the thundering

seas that beat the shore. And hand-over-hand he came, past the reef on which the ship lay, across the wild stretch of deep water, over the second and more perilous reef, and into the middle of the breakers of the beach. There he lost his hold, but Tahuna dashed into the surf, and seized him. The chief could now give no attention to his own safety, but his wife and Amiria hauled on the life-line, and prevented him and his burden from being carried seawards by the back-wash. And so the first man was saved from the wreck of *The Mersey Witch*.

Others soon followed; Tahuna became exhausted; his wife took his place, and tied the life-line round her waist. After she had rescued four men, Enoko came to himself and relieved her; and Amiria, not to be outdone in daring, tied the other end of the line about her waist, and took her stand beside the half-blind man.

As the captain, who was the last man to leave the ship, was dragged out of the raging sea, a troop of Maoris arrived from the *pa* with blankets, food, and drink. Soon the newcomers had lighted a fire in a sheltered niche of the cliff, and round the cheerful blaze they placed the chilled and exhausted sailors.

The captain, when he could speak, said to Tahuna, "Weren't you one of those who swam out to the ship?"

"Yeh, boss, that me," replied the chief in broken English. "You feel all right now, eh?"

"Where are the women we saw in the water?"

"T'e *wahine*?" said Tahuna. "They all right, boss."

"Where are they? I should like to see them. I should like to thank them."

The chief's wife, her back against the cliff, was resting after her exertions. Amiria was attending to one of the men she had dragged out of the surf, a tall, fair man, whose limbs she was chafing beside the fire. When the chief called to his wife and the girl, Amiria rose, and placing her Englishman in the charge of a big Maori woman, she flung over her shoulders an old *korowai* cloak which she had picked up from the beach, and pushing through the throng, was presented to the captain.

He was a short, thick-set man, weather-beaten by two score voyages. "So you're the girl we saw in the water," said he. "Pleased to meet you, miss, pleased to meet you," and then after a pause, "Your daughter, chief?"

Amiria's face broke into a smile, and from her pretty mouth bubbled the sweetest laughter a man could hear.

"Not my taughter," replied Tahuna, as his wife approached, "but this my *wahine*, what you call wife."

The Maori woman was smiling the generous smile of her race.

"You're a brave crowd," said the captain. "My crew and I owe you our lives. My prejudice against colour is shaken – I'm not sure that it'll ever recover the shock you've given it. A man may sail round the world a dozen times, an' there's still something he's got to learn. I never would ha' believed a man, let alone a woman, could ha' swum in such a sea. An' you're Natives of the country? – a fine race, a fine race." As they stood, talking, rain

had commenced to drive in from the sea. The captain surveyed the miserable scene for a moment or two; then he said, “I think, chief, that if you’re ready we’ll get these men under shelter.” And so, some supported by their dusky friends, and some carried in blankets, the crew of *The Mersey Witch*, drenched and cold, but saved from the sea, were conveyed to the huts of the *pa*.

# CHAPTER III

## The Pilot's Daughter

She came out of the creeper-covered house into a garden of roses, and stood with her hand on a green garden-seat; herself a rosebud bursting into perfection.

Below her were gravelled walks and terraced flower-beds, cut out of the hill-side on which the quaint, gabled house stood; her fragrant, small domain carefully secreted behind a tall, clipped hedge, over the top of which she could see from where she stood the long sweep of the road which led down to the port of Timber Town.

She was dressed in a plain, blue, cotton blouse and skirt; her not over-tall figure swelling plumply beneath their starched folds. Her hair was of a nondescript brown, beautified by a glint of gold, so that her uncovered head looked bright in the sunlight. Her face was such as may be seen any day in the villages which nestle beneath the Sussex Downs, under whose shadow she was born; her forehead was broad and white; her eyes blue; her cheeks the colour of the blush roses in her garden; her mouth small, with lips coloured pink like a shell on the beach. As she stood, gazing down the road, shading her eyes with her little hand,

and displaying the roundness and whiteness of her arm to the inquisitive eyes of nothing more lascivious than the flowers, a girl on horseback drew up at the gate, and called, "Cooee!"

She was tall and brown, dressed in a blue riding-habit, and in her hand she carried a light, silver-mounted whip. She jumped lightly from the saddle, opened the gate, and led her horse up the drive.

The fair girl ran down the path, and met her near the tethering-post which stood under a tall bank.

"Amiria, I *am* glad to see you!"

"But think of all I have to tell you." The brown girl's intonation was deep, and she pronounced every syllable richly. "We don't have a wreck every day to talk about."

"Come inside, and have some lunch. You must be famishing after your long ride."

"Oh, no, I'm not hungry. *Taihoa*, by-and-by."

The horse was tied up securely, and the girls, a contrast of blonde and brunette, walked up the garden-path arm-in-arm.

"I have heard *such* things about you," said the fair girl.

"But you should see him, my dear," said the brown. "You would have risked a good deal to save him if you had been there – tall, strong, struggling in the sea, and *so* helpless."

"You *are* brave, Amiria. It's nonsense to pretend you don't know it. All the town is talking about you." The white face looked at the brown, mischievously. "And now that you have got him, my dear, keep him."

Amiria's laugh rang through the garden. "There is no hope for me, if *you* are about, Miss Rose Summerhayes," she said.

"But wasn't it perfectly awful? We heard you were drowned yourself."

"Nonsense! I got wet, but that was all. Of course, if I was weak or a bad swimmer, then there would have been no hope. But I know every rock, every channel, where the sea breaks its force, and where it is strongest. There was no danger."

"How many men?"

"Twenty-nine; and the one drowned makes thirty."

"And which is *the* particular one, your treasure trove? Of course, he will marry you as soon as the water is out of his ears, and make you happy ever afterwards."

Amiria laughed again. "First, he is handsome; next, he is a *rangatira*, well-born, as my husband ought to be. I really don't know his name. Can't you guess that is what I have come to find out?"

"You goose. You've come to unburden yourself. You were just dying to tell me the story."

They had paused on the verandah, where they sat on a wooden seat in the shade.

"Anyway, the wreck is better for the Maori than a sitting of the Land Court – there! The shore is covered with boxes and bales and all manner of things. There are ready-made clothes for everyone in the *pa*, boots, tea, tobacco, sugar, everything that the people want – all brought ashore from the wreck and strewn

along the beach. The Customs' Officers get some, but the Maori gets most. I've brought you a memento."

She put her hand into the pocket of her riding-habit, and drew out a little packet. "That is for you – a souvenir of the wreck."

"Isn't it rather like stealing, to take what really belongs to other people?"

"Rubbish! Open it, and see for yourself," said Amiria, smiling.

Rose undid the packet's covering, and disclosed a black leather-covered case, much the worse for wear.

"It isn't injured by the water – it was in a tin-lined box," said the Maori girl. "It opens like a card-case."

Rose opened the little receptacle, which divided in the middle, and there lay exposed a miniature portrait framed in oxidized silver.

The portrait represented a beautiful woman, yellow-haired, with blue eyes and a bright colour on her cheeks, lips which showed indulgence in every curve, and a snow-white neck around which was clasped a string of red coral beads.

Rose fixed her eyes on the picture.

"Why do you give me this?" she asked. "Who is it?"

Amiria turned the miniature over. On its back was written "Annabel Summerhayes."

Rose turned slightly pale as she read the name, and her breath caught in her throat. "This must be my mother," she said quietly. "When she died, I was too young to remember her."

Both girls looked at the portrait; the brown face close to the

fair, the black hair touching the brown.

"She must have been very good," said Amiria, " – look how kind she is."

Rose was silent.

"Isn't that a nice memento of the wreck," continued the Maori girl. "But anyhow you would have received it, for the Collector of Customs has the packing-case in which it was found. However, I thought you would like to get it as soon as possible."

"How kind you are," said Rose, as she kissed Amiria. "This is the only picture of my mother I have seen. I never knew what she was like. This is a perfect revelation to me."

The tears were in her voice as well as in her eyes, and her lip trembled. Softly one brown hand stole into her white one, and another brown hand stole round her waist, and she felt Amiria's warm lips on her cheek. The two girls had been playmates as children, they had been at school together, and had always shared each other's confidences, but this matter of Annabel Summerhayes was one which her father had forbidden Rose to mention; and around the memory of her mother there had grown a mystery which the girl was unable to fathom.

"Now that this has occurred, there is no harm in disobeying my father," she said. "He told me never to speak of my mother to him or anyone else, but when you give me her picture, it would be stupid to keep silence. She looks good, doesn't she, Amiria? I think she was good, but my father destroyed everything belonging to her: he even took the trouble to change my name

from Annabel to Rose – that was after we arrived here and I was three years old. I do not possess a single thing that was hers except this picture; and even that I must hide, for fear my father should destroy it. Come, we will go in."

They passed along the shady verandah, and entered the house. Its rooms were dark and cool, and prettily if humbly furnished. Rose took Amiria along a winding passage, up a somewhat narrow flight of stairs, and into a bedroom which was in one of the many gables of the wooden house. The Maori girl took off her hat and gloves, and Rose, drawing a bunch of keys from her pocket, opened a work-box which stood on the dressing-table, and in it she hid the miniature of her mother. Then she turned, and confronted Amiria.

The dark girl's black hair, loosened by riding, had escaped from its fastenings, and now fell rippling down her back.

"It's a great trouble," she said. "Nothing will hold it – it is like wire. The pins drop out, and down it all comes."

Rose was combing and brushing the glossy, black tresses. "I'll try *my* hand," said she. "The secret is plenty of pins; you don't use enough of them. Pins, I expect, are scarce in the *pa*." She had fastened up one long coil, and was holding another in place with her white fingers, when a gruff voice roared through the house: —

"Rosebud, my gal! Rosebud, I say! What's taken the child?"

Whilst the two girls had been in the bedroom, three figures had come into sight round the bend of the beach-road. They

walked slowly, with heavy steps and swaying gait, after the manner of sailor-men. As they ascended the winding pathway leading to the house, they argued loudly.

"Jes' so, Cap'n Summerhayes," said the short, thick-set man, with a blanket wrapped round him in lieu of a coat, to the big burly man on his left, "I stood off and on, West-Nor'-West and East-Sou'-East, waiting for the gale to wear down and let me get into your tuppeny little port. Now *you* are pilot, I reckon. What would *you* ha' done?"

"What would I ha' done, Sartoris?" asked the bulky man gruffly. "Why, damme, I'd ha' beat behind Guardian Point, and took shelter."

"In the dark?"

"In the dark, I tell you."

"Then most likely, Pilot, you'd ha' run *The Witch* on the Three Sisters' reefs, or Frenchman's Island. I stood off an' on, back'ard an' forrard."

"An' shot yourself on to the rocks."

The third man said nothing. He was looking at the Pilot's house and the flowers while the two captains paused to argue, and fidgeted with the blanket he wore over his shoulders.

"Well, come in, come in," said the Pilot. "We'll finish the argyment over a glass an' a snack." And then it was that he had roared for his daughter, who, leaving Amiria to finish her toilet, tripped downstairs to meet her father.

"Why, Rosebud, my gal, I've been calling this half-hour,"

exclaimed the gruff old Pilot. “An’ here’s two gentlemen I’ve brought you, two shipwrecked sailors – Cap’n Sartoris, of *The Mersey Witch*, and Mr. Scarlett.” His voice sounded like the rattling of nails in a keg, and his manner was as rough as his voice.

Each blanketed man stepped awkwardly forward and shook hands with the girl, first the captain, and then the tall, uncomfortable-looking, younger man, who turned the colour indicated by his name.

“What they want is a rig-out,” rumbled the Pilot of Timber Town; “some coats, Rosebud; some shirts, and a good feed.” The grizzled old mariner’s face broke into a grim smile. “I’m Cap’n Summerhayes, an’t I? I’m Pilot o’ this port, an’t I? – an’ Harbour Master, in a manner o’ speaking? Very good, my gal. In all those capacities – regardless that I’m your dad – I tell you to make these gen’lemen comfortable, as if they were at home; for you never know, Rosebud, when you may be entertaining a husband unawares. You never know.” And, chuckling, the old fellow led the shipwrecked men into his bedroom.

When they had been provided with suits belonging to the Pilot, they were shown into the parlour, where they sat with their host upon oak chairs round a battered, polished table, with no cloth upon it.

Captain Sartoris was a moderately good-looking man, if a trifle weather-beaten, but dressed in the Pilot’s clothes he was in danger of being lost and smothered; and Scarlett bore himself like one who laboured under a load of misery almost too great

to be borne, but he had wisely rejected the voluminous coat proffered by his benefactor, and appeared in waistcoat and trousers which gave him the appearance of a growing boy dressed in his father's cast-off apparel.

Such was the guise of the shipwrecked men as they sat hiding as much of themselves as possible under the Pilot's table, whilst Rose Summerhayes bustled about the room. She took glasses from the sideboard and a decanter from a dumb-waiter which stood against the wall, and placed them on the table.

"And Rosebud, my gal," said the Pilot, "as it's quite two hours to dinner, we'll have a morsel of bread and cheese."

The French window stood open, and from the garden was blown the scent of flowers.

Rose brought the bread and cheese, and stood with her hands folded upon her snowy apron, alert to supply any further wants of the guests.

"And whose horse is that on the drive?" asked the Pilot.

"Amiria's," replied his daughter.

"Good: that's a gal after my heart. I'm glad she's come."

"Take a chair, miss," said Captain Sartoris from the depths of the vast garments that encumbered him.

"Thank you," replied Rose, "but I've the dinner to cook."

"Most domestic, I'm sure," continued Sartoris, trying hard to say the correct thing. "Most right an' proper. Personally, I like to see young ladies attend to home dooties."

Rose laughed. "Which is to say the comfort of you men."

"My gal," said her father sternly, "we have all we want. Me an' these gen'lemen will be quite happy till dinner-time."

Rose stooped to pick up the boots which her father had discarded for a pair of carpet-slippers, and rustled out of the room.

"Gen'lemen," said the Pilot of Timber Town, "we'll drink to better luck next time."

The three men carefully filled their glasses, emptied them in solemn silence, and put them almost simultaneously with a rattle on the polished table.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Pilot, after a long-drawn breath. "Four over proof. Soft as milk, an't it? Goes down like oil, don't it?"

"Most superior tipple," replied the skipper, "but you had your losses in *The Witch*, same as me and the owners. I had aboard six cases of the finest port as ever you tasted, sent out for you by your brother; senior partner of the firm, Mr. Scarlett. 'Cap'n Sartoris,' he says, 'I wish you good luck and a prosperous voyage, but take care o' that port wine for my brother. There's dukes couldn't buy it.' 'No, sir,' I says to him, 'but shipowners an' dukes are different. Shipowners usually get the pick of a cargo.' He laughed, an' I laughed: which we wouldn't ha' done had we known *The Witch* was going to be piled up on this confounded coast."

The Pilot had risen to his feet. His face was crimson with excitement, and his brow dark with passion.

"Cap'n Sartoris!" he exclaimed, as he brought his fist with a bang upon the table, so that the decanter and tumblers rattled,

"every sea-faring man hates to see a good ship wrecked, whoever the owner may be. None's more sorry than me to see the bones of your ship piled on that reef. But when you talk about bringing me a present o' wine from my brother, you make my blood boil. To Hell with him and all his ships!" With another bang upon the table, he paced up and down, breathing deeply, and trembling with passion still unvented.

Sartoris and Scarlett looked with astonishment at the suddenly infuriated man.

"As for his cursed port wine," continued the Pilot, "let him keep it. *I* wouldn't drink it."

"In which case," said the skipper, "if I'd ha' got into port, I'd ha' been most happy to have drank it myself."

"I'd have lent you a hand, Captain," said Scarlett.

"Most happy," replied Sartoris. "We'd ha' drank the firm's health, and the reconciliation o' these two brothers. But, Pilot, let me ask a question. What on this earth could your brother, Mr. Summerhayes, ha' done to make you reject six cases o' port – reject 'em with scorn: six cases o' the best port as was ever shipped to this or any other country? Now, that's what puzzles me."

"Then, Cap'n Sartoris – without any ill-feeling to you, though I do disagree with your handling o' that ship – I say you'll have to puzzle it out. But I ask this: If *you* had a brother who was the greatest blackguard unhung, would *you* drink his port wine?"

"It would largely depend on the quality," said the skipper –

"the quality of the wine, not o' the man."

"The senior partner of your firm is my brother."

"That's right. I don't deny it."

"If he hadn't been my brother I'd ha' killed him as sure as God made little apples. He'd a' bin dead this twenty year. It was the temptation to do it that drove me out of England; and I vowed I'd never set foot there while he lived. And he sends me presents of port wine. I wish it may choke him! I wish he may drink himself to death with it! Look you here, Sartoris: you bring back the anger I thought was buried this long while; you open the wound that twelve thousand miles of sea and this new country were healing. But – but I thank God I never touched him. I thank God I never proved as big a blackguard as he. But don't mention his name to me. If you think so much of him that you must be talking, talk to my gal, Rosebud. Tell her what a fine man she's got for an uncle, how rich he is, how generous – but *I* shall never mention his name. I'm a straight-spoken man. If I was to tell my gal what I thought of him, I should fill her with shame that such a man should be kindred flesh and blood."

The Pilot had stood still to deliver this harangue, and he now sat down, and buried his face in his hands. When he again raised his head, the skipper without a ship was helping himself sorrowfully to more of the whisky that was four over proof.

Slowly the rugged Pilot rose, and passed out of the French window into the garden of roses and the sunlight.

"I think," said Sartoris, passing the decanter to Scarlett, "that

another drop o' this will p'raps straighten us up a bit, and help us to see what we've gone an' done. For myself, I own I've lost my bearings and run into a fog-bank. I'd be glad if some one would help me out."

"The old man's a powder-magazine, to which you managed to put a match. That's how it is, Captain. These many years he's been a sleeping volcano, which has broken suddenly into violent eruption."

Both men, figures comical enough for a pantomime, looked seriously at each other; but not so Amiria, whose face appeared in the doorway.

"It's a mystery, a blessed puzzle; but I'd give half-a-crown for a smoke," said Sartoris, looking wistfully at the Pilot's tobacco-pipes on the mantelpiece. "I wonder if the young lady would object if I had a draw."

There was an audible titter in the passage.

"A man doesn't realise how poor he can be till he gets shipwrecked," said Scarlett: "then he knows what the loss of his pipe and 'baccy means."

There was a scuffling outside the door, and the young lady with the brown eyes was forcibly pushed into the room.

"Oh, Rose, I'm ashamed," exclaimed the Maori girl, as the Pilot's daughter pushed her forward. "But you two men are so funny and miserable, that I can't help myself," – she laughed good-naturedly – "and there's Captain Summerhayes, fretting and fuming in the garden, as if he'd lost a thousand pounds."

The scarecrows had risen respectfully to their feet, when suddenly the humour of the situation struck them, and they laughed in unison; and Amiria, shaking with merriment, collapsed upon the sofa, and hid her mirth in its cushions.

"Never mind," said the skipper, "it's not the clo'es that make the man. Thank God for that, Scarlett. Clo'es can't make a man a bigger rogue than he is."

"Thank God for this." Scarlett tapped his waist. "I've got here what will rig you out to look less like a Guy Fawkes. You had your money in your cabin when the ship struck; mine is in my belt."

"I wondered, when I pulled you ashore," said the Maori girl, "what it was you had round your waist."

Scarlett looked intently at the girl on the sofa.

"Do you mean *you* are the girl that saved me? You have metamorphosed yourself. Do you dress for a new character every day? Does she make a practice of this sort of thing, Miss Summerhayes – one day, a girl in the *pa*; the next, a young lady of Timber Town?"

"Amiria is two people in one," replied Rose, "and I have not found out which of them I like most, and I have known them both for ten years."

"Most interesting," said Captain Sartoris, shambling forward in his marvellous garb, and taking hold of the Maori girl's hand. "The privilege of a man old enough to be your father, my dear. I was glad to meet you on the beach – no one could ha' been

gladder – but I'm proud to meet you in the house of my old friend, Cap'n Summerhayes, and in the company of this young lady." There could be no doubt that the over-proof spirit was going to the skipper's head. "But how did you get here, my dear?"

"I rode," replied Amiria, rising from the sofa. "My horse is on the drive. Come and see him."

She led the way through the French-window, and linked arms with Rose, whilst the two strange figures followed like a couple of characters in a comic opera.

On the drive stood the Pilot, who held Amiria's big bay horse as if it were some wild animal that might bite. He had passed round the creature's neck a piece of tarred rope, which he was making fast to the tethering-post, while he exclaimed, "Whoa, my beauty. Stand still, stand still. Who's going to hurt you?"

The Maori girl, holding her skirt in one hand, tripped merrily forward and took the rope from the old seaman's grasp.

"Really, Captain," she said, laughing, "why didn't you tie his legs together, and then lash him to the post? There, there, Robin." She patted the horse's neck. "You don't care about eating pilots, or salt fish, do you, Robin?"

"We'll turn him into the paddock up the hill," said Rose. "Dinner's ready, and I'm sure the horse is not more hungry than some of us."

"None more so than Mr. Scarlett an' myself," said Sartoris, " – we've not had a sit-down meal since we were wrecked."

# CHAPTER IV

## Rachel Varnhagen

He sat on a wool-bale in his "store," amid bags of sugar, chests of tea, boxes of tobacco, octaves of spirits, coils of fencing-wire, bales of hops, rolls of carpets and floor-cloth, piles of factory-made clothes, and a miscellaneous collection of merchandise.

Old Varnhagen was a general merchant who, with equal complacency, would sell a cask of whisky, or purchase the entire wool-clip of a "run" as big as an English county. Raising his eyes from a keg of nails, he glanced lovingly round upon his abundant stock in trade; rubbed his fat hands together; chuckled; placed one great hand on his capacious stomach to support himself as his laughter vibrated through his ponderous body, and then he said, "'Tear me, 'tear me, it all com' to this. 'Tear, 'tear, how it make me laff. It jus' com' to this: the Maoris have got his cargo. All Mr. Cookenden's scheming to beat me gifs me the pull over him. 'Tear me, it make me ill with laffing. If I believed in a God, I should say Jehovah haf after all turn his face from the Gentile, and fight for his Chosen People. The cargo is outside the port: a breath of wind, and it is strewn along the shore. Now, that's what I call an intervention of Providence."

He got off the wool-bale much in the manner in which a big seal clumsily takes the water, and walked up and down his store; hands in pockets, hat on the back of his head, and a complacent smile overspreading his face. As he paused at the end of the long alleyway, formed by his piles of merchandise, and turned again to traverse the length of the warehouse, he struck an attitude of contemplation.

"Ah! but the insurance?" he exclaimed. As he stood, with bent head and grave looks, he was the typical Jew of the Ghetto; crafty, timid, watchful, cynical, cruel; his grizzled hair, close-clipped, crisp, and curly; his face pensive, and yellow as a lemon.

"But he will haf seen to that: I gif him that much credit. But in the meantime he is without his goods, and the money won't be paid for months. That gif me a six-months' pull over him."

The old smile came back, and he began to pace the store once more.

There was a rippling laugh at the further end of the building where Varnhagen's private office, partitioned off with glass and boards from the rest of the store, opened on the street. It was a laugh the old man knew well, for he hopped behind a big pile of bales like a boy playing hide-and-seek, and held his breath in expectation.

Presently, there bustled into the warehouse a vision of muslin and ribbons. Her face was the face of an angel. It did not contain a feature that might not have been a Madonna's. She had a lemon-yellow complexion, brightened by a flush of carmine in the

cheeks; her eyes were like two large, lustrous, black pearls; her hair, parted in the middle, was glossy and waving; her eyebrows were pencilled and black; her lips were as red as the petals of the geranium. But though this galaxy of beauties attracted, it was the exquisite moulding of the face that riveted the attention of Packett, the Jew's storeman, who had conducted the dream of loveliness to the scene.

She tapped the floor impatiently with her parasol.

"Fa-ther!"

She stamped her dainty foot in pretty anger.

"The aggravating old bird! I expect he's hiding somewhere."

There came a gurgling chuckle from amid the piled-up bales.

The girl stood, listening. "Come out of that!" she cried. But there was never another sound – the chuckling had ceased.

She skirmished down a by-alley, and stormed a kopje of rugs and linoleums; but found nothing except the store tom-cat in hiding on the top. Having climbed down the further side, she found herself in a difficult country of enamelled ware and wooden buckets, but successfully extricating herself from this entanglement she ascended a spur of carpet-rolls, and triumphantly crowned the summit of the lofty mountain of wool-bales. The country round lay at her feet, and half-concealed behind a barrel of Portland cement she saw the crouching form of the enemy.

Her head was up among the timbers of the roof, and hanging to nails in the cross-beams were countless twisted lengths of

clothesline, and with these dangerous projectiles she began to harass the foe. Amid the hail of hempen missiles the white flag was hoisted, and the enemy surrendered.

"Rachel! Rachel! Come down, my girl. You'll break your peautiful neck. Packett, what you stand there for like a wooden verandah-post? Go up, and help Miss Varnhagen down. Take care! – my 'tear Rachel! – look out for that bucket! – mind that coil of rubber-belting! Pe careful! That bale of hops is ofer! My 'tear child, stand still, I tell you; wait till I get the ladder."

With Packett in a position to cut off retreat, and the precipice of wool-bales in front, Rachel sat down and shook with laughter.

Varnhagen naturally argued that his pretty daughter's foot, now that the tables were so suddenly turned upon her, would with the storeman's assistance be quickly set upon the top rung of the ladder which was now in position. But he had not yet learned all Rachel's stratagems.

"No!" she cried. "I think I'll stay here."

"My child, my Rachel, you will fall!"

"Oh, dear, no: it's as firm as a rock. No, Packett, you can go down. I shall stay here."

"But, my 'tear Rachel, you'll be killed! Come down, I beg."

"Will you promise to do what I want?"

"My 'tear daughter, let us talk afterwards. I can think of nothing while you are in danger of being killed in a moment!"

"I want that gold watch in Tresco's window. I sha'n't come down till you say I can have it."

"My peautiful Rachel, it is too expensive. I will import you one for half the price. Come down before it is too late."

"What's the good of watches in London? I want that watch at Tresco's, to wear going calling. Consent, father, before it is too late."

"My loafly, how much was the watch?"

"Twenty-five pounds."

"Oh, that is too much. First, you will ruin me, and kill yourself afterwards to spite my poverty. Rachel, you make your poor old father quite ill."

"Then I am to have the watch?"

"Nefer mind the watch. Some other time talk to me of the watch. Come down safe to your old father, before you get killed."

"But I *do* mind the watch. It's what I came for. I shall stay here till you consent."

"Oh, Rachel, you haf no heart. You don't loaf your father."

"You don't love your daughter, else you'd give me what I want."

"I not loaf you, Rachel! Didn't I gif you that ring last week, and the red silk dress the week pefore? Come down, my child, and next birthday you shall have a better watch than in all Tresco's shop. My 'tear Rachel, my 'tear child, you'll be killed; and what good will be your father's money to him then? Oh! that bale moved. Rachel! sit still."

"Then you'll give me the watch?"

"Yes, yes. You shall have the watch. Come down now, while

Packett holds your hand."

"Can I have it to-day?"

"Be careful, Packett. Oh! that bale is almost ofer."

"Will you give it me this morning, father?"

"Yes, yes, this morning."

"Before I go home to dinner?"

"Yes, pefore dinner."

"Then, Packett, give me your hand. I will come down."

The dainty victress placed her little foot firmly on the uppermost rung; and while Packett held the top, and the merchant the bottom, of the ladder, the dream of muslin and ribbons descended to the floor.

Old Varnhagen gave a sigh of relief.

"You'll nefer do that again, Rachel?"

"I hope I shall never need to."

"You shouldn't upset your poor old father like that, Rachel."

"You shouldn't drive me to use such means to make you do your duty."

"My duty!"

"Yes, to give me that watch."

"Ah, the watch. I forgot it."

"I shall go now, and get it."

"Yes, my child, get it."

"I'll say you will pay at the end of the month."

"Yes, I will pay – perhaps at the end of the month, perhaps it will go towards a contra account for watches I shall supply to

Tresco. We shall see."

"Good-bye, father."

"Good-bye, Rachel; but won't you gif your old father a kiss pefore you go?"

The vision of muslin and ribbons laid her parasol upon an upturned barrel, and came towards the portly Jew. Her soft dress was crumpled by his fat hand, and her pretty head was nestled on his shoulder.

"Ah! my 'tear Rachel. Ah! my peautiful. You loaf your old father. My liddle taughter, I gif you everything; and you loaf me very moch, eh?"

"Of course, I do. And won't it look well with a brand-new gold chain to match?"

"Next time my child wants something, she won't climb on the wool-bales and nearly kill herself?"

"Of course not. I shall wear it this afternoon when I go out calling."

"Now kiss me, and run away while I make some more money for my liddle Rachel."

The saintly face raised itself, and looked with a smile into the face of the old Jew; and then the bright red lips fixed themselves upon his wrinkled cheek.

"You are a good girl; you are my own child; you shall have everything you ask; you shall have all I've got to give."

"Good-bye, father. Thanks awfully much."

"Good-bye, Rachel."

The girl turned; the little heels tapped regularly on the floor; the pigeon-like walk was resumed; and Rachel Varnhagen, watched by the loving eyes of her father, passed into the street.

The gold-buying clerk at the Kangaroo Bank was an immaculately dressed young man with a taste for jewelry. In his tie he wore a pearl, in a gold setting shaped like a diminutive human hand; his watch-chain was of gold, wrought in a wonderful and extravagant design. As he stepped through the swinging, glazed doors of the Bank, and stood on the broad step without, at the witching hour of twelve, he twirled his small black moustache so as to display to advantage the sparkling diamond ring which encircled the little finger of his left hand. His Semitic features wore an expression of great self-satisfaction, and his knowing air betokened intimate knowledge of the world and all that therein is. He nodded familiarly to a couple of young men who passed by, and glanced with the appreciative eye of a connoisseur at the shop-girls who were walking briskly to their dinners.

Loitering across the pavement he stood upon the curbing, and looked wistfully up and down the street. Presently there hove in sight a figure that riveted his attention: it was Rachel Varnhagen, with muslins blowing in the breeze and ribbons which streamed behind, approaching like a ship in full sail.

The gold-clerk crossed over the street to meet her, and raised his hat.

"You're in an awful hurry. Where bound, Rachel?"

"If *your* old Dad told *you* to go and buy a gold watch and chain, *you'd* be in a hurry, lest he might change his mind."

"My soul hankers after something dearer than watches and chains. If your Dad would give me leave, I'd annex his most precious jewel before he could say, 'Knife!' He'd never get a chance to change his mind. But he always says, 'My boy, you wait till you're a manager, and can give me a big overdraft.' At that rate we shall have to wait till Doomsday."

"The watch is at Tresco's. Come along: help me turn the shop upside down to find the dandiest."

"How d'you manage to get round the Governor, Rachel? I'd like to know the dodge."

"He wouldn't mind if *you* fell off a stack of bales and broke your neck. He'd say, 'Thank God! that solves that liddle difficulty.'"

"Wool bales? Has wool gone up? I don't understand."

"Of course you don't, stupid. If you were on the top of a pile of swaying bales, old Podge would say, 'Packett, take away the ladder: that nice young man must stay there. It's better for him to die than marry Rachel – she'd drive him mad with bills in a month.'"

"Oh, that wouldn't trouble me – I'd draw on *him*."

"Oh, would you?" Rachel laughed sceptically. "You don't know the Gov. if you think that. You couldn't bluff him into paying a shilling. But *I* manage him all right. *I* can get what I want, from a trip to Sydney to a gold watch, dear boy."

"Then why don't you squeeze a honeymoon out of him? – that would be something new, Rachel."

She actually paused in her haste.

"Wouldn't it be splendid!" she exclaimed, putting her parasol well back behind her head, so that the glow of its crimson silk formed a telling background to her face. "Wouldn't it be gorgeous? But as soon as I'm married he will say, 'No, Rachel, my dear child, your poor old father is supplanted – your husband now has the sole privilege of satisfying your expensive tastes. Depend on him for everything you want.' What a magnificent time I should have on your twelve notes a month!"

The spruce bank-clerk was subdued in a moment, in the twinkling of one of Rachel's beautiful black eyes – his matrimonial intentions had been rudely reduced to a basis of pounds, shillings and pence.

But just at this embarrassing point of the conversation they turned into Tresco's doorway, and confronted the rubicund goldsmith, whose beaming smile seemed to fill the whole shop.

"I saw an awf'ly jolly watch in your window," said Rachel.

"Probably. Nothing more likely, Miss Varnhagen," replied Benjamin. "Gold or silver?"

"Gold, of course! Let me see what you've got."

"Why, certainly." Tresco took gold watches from the window, from the glass case on the counter, from the glass cupboard that stood against the wall, from the depths of the great iron safe, from everywhere, and placed them in front of the pretty

Jewess. Then he glanced with self-approval at the bank-clerk, and said: "I guarantee them to keep perfect time. And, after all, there's nothing like a good watch – a young lady cannot keep her appointments, or a young man be on time, without a watch. Most important: no one should be without it."

Rachel was examining the chronometers, one by one; opening and shutting their cases, examining their dials, peering into their mysterious works. She had taken off her gloves, and her pretty hands, ornamented with dainty rings, were displayed in all their shapeliness and delicacy.

"What's the price?" she asked.

"Prices to suit all buyers," said Tresco. "They go from ten pounds upwards. This is the one I recommend – it carries a guarantee for five years – jewelled throughout, in good, strong case – duplex escapement – compensation balance. Price £25." He held up a gold chronometer in a case which was flat and square, with rounded corners, and engraved elaborately – a watch which would catch the eye and induce comment.

The jeweller had gauged the taste of his fair customer.

"Oh! the duck."

"The identical article, the ideal lady's watch," said Tresco, unctuously.

"And now the chain," said Rachel.

Benjamin took a dozen lady's watch-guards from a blue velvet pad, and handed them to the girl.

The gold clerk of the Kangaroo Bank stood by, and watched,

as Rachel held the dainty chains, one by one, across her bust.

"Quite right, sir, quite right," remarked the goldsmith. "When a gentleman makes a present to a lady, let him do the thing handsome. Them's my sentiments."

The girl looked at Tresco, and laughed.

"This is to be booked to my father," she said. "There, that's the one I like best." She held out an elaborate chain, with a round bauble hanging from it. "If you had to depend on Mr. Zahn, here, you'd have to wait till the cows came home."

Benjamin was wrapping up the watch in a quantity of tissue paper.

"No, no. I'll wear it," exclaimed Rachel. One dainty hand stretched forward and took the watch, while the other held the chain. "There," she said, as she handed the precious purchase to her sweetheart, "fix it on."

She threw her head back, laid her hand lightly on the young man's arm, and allowed him to tuck the watch into her bodice and fasten the chain around her neck.

He lingered long over the process.

"Yes, I would," said the voice from behind the counter. "I most certainly should give her one on the cheek, as a reward. Don't mind me; I've done it myself when I was young, before I lost my looks."

The young man stepped back, and Rachel, after the manner of a pouter pigeon, nestled her chin on her breast, in her endeavour to see how the watch looked in wearing. Then she tapped the

floor with the toe of her shoe indignantly, and said, looking straight at the goldsmith: "You lost your looks? What a find they must have been for the man who picked them up. If I were you, I'd advertise for them, and offer a handsome a reward – they must be valuable."

"Most certainly, they were," replied Benjamin, his smile spreading across his broad countenance, "they were the talk of all my lady friends and the envy of my rivals."

"I expect it was the rivals that spoilt them. But don't cry over spilt milk, old gentleman."

"Certainly not, most decidedly not – there are compensations. The price of the watch and chain is £33."

"Never mind the price. *I* don't want to know the price – that'll interest my Dad. Send the account to him, and make yourself happy."

And, touching her sweetheart's arm as a signal for departure, the dazzling vision of muslins and ribbons vanished from the shop.

# CHAPTER V

## Bill the Prospector

He came down the street like a dog that has strayed into church during sermon-time; a masterless man without a domicile. He was unkempt and travel-stained; his moleskin trousers, held up by a strap buckled round his waist, were trodden down at the heels; under the hem of his coat, a thing of rents and patches, protruded the brass end of a knife-sheath. His back was bent under the weight of his neat, compact swag, which contained his six-by-eight tent and the blankets and gear necessary to a bushman. He helped his weary steps with a long *manuka* stick, to which still clung the rough red bark, and looking neither to left nor right, he steadfastly trudged along the middle of the road. What with his ragged black beard which grew almost to his eyes, and the brim of his slouch hat, which had once been black, but was now green with age and weather, only the point of his rather characterless nose and his two bright black eyes were visible. But though to all appearances he was a desperate ruffian, capable of robbery and cold-blooded murder, his was a welcome figure in Timber Town. Men turned to look at him as he tramped past in his heavy, mud-stained blucher boots. One man, standing outside

The Lucky Digger, asked him if he had "struck it rich." But the "swagger" looked at the man, without replying.

"Come and have a drink, mate," said another.

"Ain't thirsty," replied the "swagger."

"Let 'im alone," said a third. "Can't you see he's bin working a 'duffer'?"

Benjamin Tresco, standing on the curb of the pavement, watched the advent of the prospector with an altogether remarkable interest, which rose to positive restlessness when he saw the digger pause before the entrance of the Kangaroo Bank.

The ill-clad, dirty stranger pushed through the swinging, glass door, stood with his hobnailed boots on the tesselated pavement inside the bank, and contemplated the Semitic face of the spruce clerk who, with the glittering gold-scales by his side, stood behind the polished mahogany counter.

But either the place looked too grand and expensive, or else the clerk's appearance offended, but the "swagger" backed out of the building, and stood once more upon the asphalt, wearing the air of a stray dog with no home or friends.

Tresco crossed the street. With extended hand, portly mien, and benign countenance, he approached the digger, after the manner of a benevolent sidesman in a church.

"Selling gold, mate?" He spoke in his most confidential manner. "Come this way. *I* will help you."

Down the street he took the derelict, like a ship in full sail towing a battered, mastless craft into a haven of safety.

Having brought the "swagger" to a safe anchorage inside his shop, Tresco shut the door, to the exclusion of all intruders; took his gold-scales from a shelf where they had stood, unused and dusty, for many a month; stepped behind the counter, and said, in his best business manner: "Now, sir."

The digger unhitched his swag and dropped it unceremoniously on the floor, stood his long *manuka* stick against the wall, thrust his hand inside his "jumper," looked at the goldsmith's rubicund face, drew out a long canvas bag which was tied at the neck with a leather boot-lace, and said, in a hoarse whisper, "There, mister, that's my pile."

Tresco balanced the bag in his hand.

"You've kind o' struck it," he said, as he looked at the digger with a blandness which could not have been equalled.

The digger may have grinned, or he may have scowled – Tresco could not tell – but, to all intents and purposes, he remained imperturbable, for his wilderness of hair and beard, aided by his hat, covered the landscape of his face.

"Ja-ake!" roared the goldsmith, in his rasping, raucous voice, as though the apprentice were quarter of a mile away. "Come here, you young limb!"

The shock-headed, rat-faced youth shot like a shrapnel shell from the workshop, and burst upon the astonished digger's gaze.

"Take this bob and a jug," said the goldsmith, "and fetch a quart. We'll drink your health," he added, turning to the man with the gold, "and a continual run of good luck."

The digger for the first time found his full voice. It was as though the silent company of the wood-hens in the "bush" had caused the hinges of his speech to become rusty. His words jerked themselves spasmodically from behind his beard, and his sentences halted, half-finished.

"Yes. That's so. If you ask me. Nice pile? Oh, yes. Good streak o' luck. Good streak, as you say. Yes. Ha, ha! Ho, ho!" He actually broke into a laugh.

Tresco polished the brass dish of his scales, which had grown dim and dirty with disuse; then he untied the bag of gold, and poured the rich contents into the dish. The gold lay in a lovely, dull yellow heap.

"Clean, rough gold," said Tresco, peering closely at the precious mound, and stirring it with his grimy forefinger. "It'll go £3 15s. You're in luck, mister. You've struck it rich, and" – he assumed his most benignant expression – "there's plenty more where this came from, eh?"

"You bet," said the digger. "Oh, yes, any Gawd's quantity." He laughed again. "You must think me pretty green, mister." He continued to laugh. "How much for the lot?"

Tresco spread the gold over the surface of the dish in a layer, and, puffing gently but adroitly, he winnowed it with his nicotine-ladened breath till no particle of sand remained with the gold. Then he put the dish on the scales, and weighed the digger's "find."

"Eighty-two ounces ten pennyweights six grains," he said, with

infinite deliberation, and began to figure on a piece of paper. Seemingly, the goldsmith's arithmetic was as rusty as the digger's speech, for the sum took so long to work out that the owner of the gold had time to cut a "fill" of tobacco from a black plug, charge his pipe, and smoke for fully five minutes, before Tresco proclaimed the total. This he did with a triumphant wave of the pen.

"Three hundred and nine pounds seven shillings and elevenpence farthing. That's as near as I can get it. Nice clean gold, mister."

He looked at the digger; the digger looked at him.

"What name?" asked Tresco. "To whom shall I draw the cheque?"

"That's good! My name?" laughed the digger. "I s'pose it's usual, eh?"

"De-cidedly."

"Sometimes they call me Bill the Prospector, sometimes Bill the Hatter. I ain't particular. I've got no choice. Take which you like."

"'Pay Bill the Prospector, or Order, three hundred and nine pounds.' No, sir, that will hardlee do. I want your real name, your proper legal title."

"Sounds grand, don't it? 'Legal title,' eh? But if you must have it – though it ar'n't hardly ever used – put me down Bill Wurcott. That suit, eh? – Bill Wurcott?"

Tresco began to draw the cheque.

"Never mind the silver," said the digger. "Make it three hundred an' nine quid." And just then Jake entered with the quart jug, tripped over the digger's swag, spilt half-a-pint of beer on the floor, recovered himself in time to save the balance, and exclaimed, "Holee smoke!"

"Tell yer what," said the digger. "Let the young feller have the change. Good idea, eh?"

Jake grinned – he grasped the situation in a split second.

The digger took the cheque from Tresco, looked at it upside-down, and said, "That's all right," folded it up, put it in his breeches' pocket just as if it had been a common one-pound note, and remarked, "Well, I must make a git. So-long."

"No, sir," said the goldsmith. "There is the beer: here are the men. No, sir; not thus must you depart. Refresh the inner man. Follow me. We must drink your health and continued good fortune."

Carefully carrying the beer, Tresco led the way to his workshop, placed the jug on his bench, and soon the amber-coloured liquor foamed in two long glasses.

The digger put his pint to his hairy lips, said, "*Kia ora.* Here's fun," drank deep and gasped – the froth ornamenting his moustache. "The first drop I've tasted this three months."

"You must ha' come from way back, where there're no shanties," risked Tresco.

"From way back," acknowledged the digger.

"Twelve solid weeks? You *must* have a thirst."

"Pretty fair, you bet." The digger groped about in the depth of his pocket, and drew forth a fine nugget. "Look at that," he said, with his usual chuckle.

Tresco balanced the lump of gold in his deft hand.

"Three ounces?"

"Three, six."

"'Nother little cheque. Turn out your pockets, mister. I'll buy all you've got."

"That's the lot," said the digger, taking back the nugget and fingering it lovingly. "I don't sell that – it's my lucky bit; the first I found." Another chuckle. "Tell you what. Some day you can make me something outer this, something to wear for a charm. No alloy, you understand; all pure gold. And use the whole nugget."

Tresco pursed his lips, and looked contemplative.

"A three-ounce charm, worn round the neck, might strangle a digger in a swollen creek. Where'd his luck be then? But how about your missis? Can't you divide it?"

The digger laughed his loudest.

"Give it the missis! That's good. The missis'd want more'n an ounce and a half for her share. Mister, wimmen's expensive."

"Ain't you got no kid to share the charm with?"

"Now you're gettin' at me" – the chuckle again – "worse 'an ever. You're gettin' at me fine. Look 'ere, I'm goin' to quit: I'm off."

"But, in the meantime, what am I to do with this nice piece

of gold? I could make a ring for each of your fingers, and some for your toes. I could pretty near make you a collarette, to wear when you go to evening parties in a low-necked dress, or a watch chain more massive than the bloomin' Mayor's. There's twelve pounds' worth of gold in that piece."

The digger looked perplexed. The problem puzzled him.

"How'd an amulet suit you?" suggested the goldsmith.

"A what?"

"A circle for the arm, with a charm device chased on it."

"A bit like a woman, that – eh, mister?"

"Not at all. The Prince o' Wales, an' the Dook o' York, an' all the *elite* wears 'em. It'd be quite the fashion."

The digger returned the nugget to his pocket. "I call you a dam' amusin' cuss, I do that. You're a goer. There ain't no keepin' up with the likes o' *you*. You shall make what you blame well please – we'll talk about it by-and-by. But for the present, where's the best pub?"

"The Lucky Digger," said Jake, without hesitation.

"Certainly," reiterated Tresco. "You'll pass it on your way to the Bank."

"Well, so-long," said the digger. "See you later." And, shouldering his swag, he held out his horny hand.

"I reckon," said the goldsmith. "Eight o'clock this evening. So-long." And the digger went out.

Tresco stood on his doorstep, and with half-shut eyes watched the prospector to the door of The Lucky Digger.

"Can't locate it," he mused, "and I know where all the gold, sold in this town, comes from. Nor I can't locate *him*. But he's struck it, and struck it rich."

There were birch twigs caught in the straps of the digger's "swag," and he had a bit of *rata* flower stuck in the band of his hat. "That's where he's come from!" Tresco pointed in the direction of the great range of mountains which could be seen distinctly through the window of his workshop.

"What's it worth?" asked Jake, who stood beside his master.

"The gold? Not a penny less than £3/17/-an ounce, my son."

"An' you give £3/15/-. Good business, boss."

"I drew him a cheque for three hundred pounds, and I haven't credit at the bank for three hundred shillings. So I must go and sell this gold before he has time to present my cheque. Pretty close sailing, Jake.

"But mark me, young shaver. There's better times to come. If the discovery of this galoot don't mean a gold boom in Timber Town, you may send the crier round and call me a flathead. Things is goin' to hum."

# CHAPTER VI

## The Father of Timber Town

"I never heard the like of it!" exclaimed Mr. Crewe. "You say, eighty-two ounces of gold? You say it came from within fifty miles of Timber Town? Why, sir, the matter must be looked into." The old gentleman's voice rose to a shrill treble. "Yes, indeed, it *must*."

They were sitting in the Timber Town Club: the ancient Mr. Crewe, Scarlett, and Cathro, a little man who rejoiced in the company of the rich octogenarian.

"I'm new at this sort of thing," said Scarlett: "I've just come off the sea. But when the digger took a big bit of gold from his pocket, I looked at it, open-eyed – I can tell you that. I called the landlord, and ordered drinks – I thought that the right thing to do. And, by George! it was. The ruffianly-looking digger drank his beer, insisted on calling for more, and then locked the door."

Mr. Crewe was watching the speaker closely, and hung on every word he uttered. Glancing at the lean and wizened Cathro, he said, "You hear that, Cathro? He locked the door, sir. Did you ever hear the like?"

"From inside his shirt," Scarlett continued, "he drew a fat

bundle of bank notes, which he placed upon the table. Taking a crisp one-pound note from the pile, he folded it into a paper-light, and said, 'I could light my pipe with this an' never feel it.'

"'Don't think of such a thing,' I said, and placed a sovereign on the table, 'I'll toss you for it.'

"'Right!' said my hairy friend. 'Sudden death?'

"'Sudden death,' I said.

"'Heads,' said he."

"Think of that, now!" exclaimed Mr. Crewe. "The true digger, Cathro, the true digger, I know the *genus*– there's no mistaking it. Most interesting. Go on, sir."

"The coin came down tails, and I pocketed the bank-note.

"'Lookyer here, mate,' said my affluent friend. 'That don't matter. We'll see if I can't get it back,' and he put another note on the table. I won that, too. He doubled the stakes, and still I won.

"'You had luck on the gold-fields,' I said, 'but when you come to town things go dead against you.'

"'Luck!' he cried. 'Now watch me. If I lost the whole of thisyer bloomin' pile, I could start off to-morrer mornin' an, before nightfall, I'd be on ground where a week's work would give me back all I'd lost. An' never a soul in this blank, blank town knows where the claim is.'"

"Well, well," gasped old Mr. Crewe; his body bent forward, and his eyes peering into Scarlett's face. "I've lived here since the settlement was founded. I got here when the people lived in nothing better than Maori *whares* and tents, when the ground on

which this very club stands was a flax-swamp. I have seen this town grow, sir, from a camp to the principal town of a province. I know every man and boy living in it, do I not, Cathro? I know every hill and creek within fifty miles of it; I've explored every part of the bush, and I tell you I never saw payable gold in any stream nearer than Maori Gully, to reach which you must go by sea."

"What about the man's mates?" asked Cathro.

"I asked him about them," replied Scarlett. "I said, 'You have partners in this thing, I suppose.' 'You mean pals,' he said. 'No, sir. I'm a hatter – no one knows the place but me. I'm sole possessor of hundreds of thousands of ounces of gold. There's my Miner's Right.' He threw a dirty parchment document on the table, drawn out in the name of William Wurcott."

"Wurcott? Wurcott?" repeated Mr. Crewe, contemplatively. "I don't know the name. The man doesn't belong to Timber Town."

"You speak as though you thought no one but a Timber Town man should get these good things." Cathro smiled as he spoke.

"No, sir," retorted the old gentleman, testily. "I said no such thing, sir. I simply said he did not belong to this town. But you must agree with me, it's a precious strange thing that we men of this place have for years been searching the country round here for gold, and, by Jupiter! a stranger, an outsider, a mere interloper, a miserable 'hatter' from God knows where, discovers gold two days' journey from the town, and brings in over eighty

ounces?" The old man's voice ran up to a falsetto, he stroked his nose with his forefinger and thumb, he broke into the shrill laugh of an octogenarian. "And the rascal boasts he can get a hundred ounces more in a week or two! We must look into the matter – we must see what it means."

The three men smoked silently and solemnly.

"Scarlett, here, owns the man's personal acquaintance," said Cathro. "The game is to go mates with him – Scarlett, the 'hatter,' and myself."

All three of them sat silent, and thought hard.

"But what if your 'hatter' won't fraternize?" asked Mr. Crewe. "You young men are naturally sanguine, but I know these diggers. They may be communicative enough over a glass, but next day the rack and thumbscrews wouldn't extract a syllable from them."

"All the more reason why we should go, and see the digger what time Scarlett deems him to be happy in his cups." This was Cathro's suggestion, and he added, "If he won't take us as mates, we may at least learn the locality of his discovery. With your knowledge of the country, Mr. Crewe, the rest should be easy."

"It all sounds very simple," replied the venerable gentleman, "but experience has taught me that big stakes are not won quite so easily. However, we shall see. When our friend, Scarlett, is ready, *we* are ready; and when I say I take up a matter of this kind, you know I mean to go through with it, even if I have to visit the spot myself and prospect on my own account. For believe me, gentlemen, this may be the biggest event in the history of Timber

Town." Mr. Crewe had risen to his feet, and was walking to and fro in front of the younger men. "If payable gold were found in these hills, this town would double its population in three months, business would flourish, and everybody would have his pockets lined with gold. I don't talk apocryphally. I have seen such things repeatedly, upon the Coast. I have seen small townships literally flooded with gold, and yet a pair of boots, a tweed coat, and the commonest necessaries of life, could not be procured there for love or money."

# CHAPTER VII

## Cut-throat Euchre

"Give the stranger time to sort his cards," said the thin American, with the close-cropped head.

"Why, certainly, certainly," replied the big and bloated Englishman, who sat opposite. "Well, my noble, what will you do?"

The Prospector, who was the third player, looked up from his "hand" and drummed the table with the ends of his dirty fingers.

"What do I make it? Why, I turn it down."

"Pass again," said the American.

"Ditto," said the Englishman.

"Then this time I make it 'Spades,'" said the digger, bearded to the eyes; his tangled thatch of black hair hiding his forehead, and his clothes such as would have hardly tempted a rag-picker.

"You make it 'next,' eh?" It was the Englishman who spoke.

"We'll put you through, siree," said the American, who was a small man, without an atom of superfluous flesh on his bones. His hair stood upright on his head, his dough-coloured face wore a perpetual smile, and he was the happy possessor of a gold eye-tooth with which he constantly bit his moustache. The player who

had come to aid him in plucking the pigeon was a big man with a florid complexion and heavy, sensuous features, which, however, wore a good-natured expression.

The game was cut-throat euchre; one pound points. So that each of the three players contributed five pounds to the pool, which lay, gold, silver and bank-notes, in a tempting pile in the middle of the table.

"Left Bower, gen'lemen," said the digger, placing the Knave of Clubs on the table.

"The deuce!" exclaimed the florid man.

"Can't help you, partner," said the man with the gold tooth, playing a low card.

"One trick," said the digger, and he put down the Knave of Spades. "There's his mate."

"Right Bower, egad!" exclaimed the big man, who was evidently minus trumps.

The pasty-faced American played the Ace of Spades without saying a word.

"A blanky march!" cried the digger. "Look-a-here. How's that for high?" and he placed on the table his three remaining cards – the King, Queen, and ten of trumps.

The other players showed their hands, which were full of red cards.

"Up, and one to spare," exclaimed the digger, and took the pool.

About fifty pounds, divided into three unequal piles, lay on

the table, and beside each player's money stood a glass.

The florid man was shuffling the pack, and the other two were arranging their marking cards, when the door opened slowly, and the Father of Timber Town, followed by Cathro and Scarlett, entered the room.

"Well, well. Hard at it, eh, Garsett?" said the genial old gentleman, addressing himself to the Englishman. "Cut-throat euchre, by Jupiter! A ruinous game, Mr. Lichfield," – to the man with the gold tooth – "but your opponent" – pointing with his stick to the digger – "seems to have all the luck. Look at his pile, Cathro. Your digger friend, eh, Scarlett? Look at his pile – the man's winning."

Scarlett nodded.

"He's in luck again," said Mr. Crewe; "in luck again, by all that's mighty."

The pool was made up, the cards were dealt, and the game continued. The nine of Hearts was the "turn-up" card.

"Pass," said Lichfield.

"Then I order you up," said the digger.

The burly Garsett drew a card from his "hand," placed it under the pack, and said, "Go ahead. Hearts are trumps."

The gentleman with the gold tooth played the King of Hearts, the digger a small trump, and Garsett his turn-up card.

"Ace of Spades," said Lichfield, playing that card.

"Trump," said the digger, as he put down the Queen of Hearts.

"Ace of trumps!" exclaimed Garsett, and took the trick.

"'Strewth!" cried the man from the "bush." "But let's see your next."

"You haven't a hope," said the big gambler. "Two to one in notes we euchre you."

"Done," replied the digger, and he took a dirty one-pound bank-note from his heap of money.

"Most exciting," exclaimed Mr. Crewe. "Quite spirited. The trumps must all be out, Cathro. Let us see what all this betting means."

"Right Bower," said the Englishman.

"Ho-ho! stranger," the American cried. "I guess that pound belongs to Mr. Garsett."

The digger put the Knave of Diamonds on the table, and handed the money to his florid antagonist.

"Your friend is set back two points, Scarlett." It was Mr. Crewe that spoke. "England and America divide the pool."

The digger looked up at the Father of Timber Town.

"If you gen'l'men wish to bet on the game, well and good," he said, somewhat heatedly. "But if you're not game to back your opinion, then keep your blanky mouths shut!"

Old Mr. Crewe was as nettled at this unlooked-for attack as if a battery of artillery had suddenly opened upon him.

"Heh! What?" he exclaimed. "You hear that, Cathro? Scarlett, you hear what your friend says? He wants to bet on the game, and that after being euchred and losing his pound to Mr. Garsett. Why, certainly, sir. I'll back my opinion with the greatest

pleasure. I'll stake a five-pound note on it. You'll lose this game, sir."

"Done," said the digger, and he counted out five sovereigns and placed them in a little heap by themselves.

Mr. Crewe had not come prepared for a "night out with the boys." He found some silver in his pocket and two pounds in his sovereign-case.

"Hah! no matter," he said. "Cathro, call the landlord. I take your bet, sir" – to the digger – "most certainly I take it, but one minute, give me one minute."

"If there's any difficulty in raising the cash," said the digger, fingering his pile of money, "I won't press the matter. *I* don't want your blanky coin. I can easy do without it."

The portly, rubicund landlord of the Lucky Digger entered the room.

"Ah, Townson," said old Mr. Crewe, "good evening. We have a little bet on, Townson, a little bet between this gentleman from away back and myself, and I find I'm without the necessary cash. I want five pounds. I'll give you my IOU."

"Not at all," replied the landlord, in a small high voice, totally surprising as issuing from such a portly person, "no IOU. I'll gladly let you have twenty."

"Five is all I want, Townson; and I expect to double it immediately, and then I shall be quite in funds."

The landlord disappeared and came back with a small tray, on which was a bundle of bank-notes, some dirty, some clean and

crisp. The Father of Timber Town counted the money. "Twenty pounds, Townson. Very well. You shall have it in the morning. Remind me, Cathro, that I owe Mr. Townson twenty pounds."

The digger looked with surprise at the man who could conjure money from a publican.

"Who in Hades are *you*?" he asked, as Mr. Crewe placed his £5 beside the digger's. "D'you own the blanky pub?"

"No, he owns the town," interposed Garsett.

The digger was upon his feet in a moment.

"Proud to meet you, mister," he cried. "Glad to have this bet with you. I like to bet with a gen'l'man. Make it ten, sir, and I shall be happier still."

"No, no," replied the ancient Mr. Crewe. "You said five, and five it shall be. That's quite enough for you to lose on one game."

"You think so? That's your blanky opinion? See that?" The digger pointed to his heap of money. "Where that come from there's enough to buy your tin-pot town three times over."

"Indeed," said Mr. Crewe. "I'm glad to hear it. Bring your money, and you shall have the town."

"Order, gentlemen, order," cried the dough-faced man. "I guess we're here to play cards, and cards we're going to play. If you three gentlemen cann't watch the game peaceably, it'll be my disagreeable duty to fire you out – and that right smart."

And just at this interesting moment entered Gentle Annie. She walked with little steps; propelling her plenitude silently but for the rustle of her silk skirt. In her hand she held a scented

handkerchief, like any lady in a drawing-room; her hair, black at the roots and auburn at the ends, was wreathed, coil on coil, upon the top of her head; her face, which gave away all her secrets, was saucy, expressive of self-satisfaction, petulance, and vanity. And yet it was a handsome face; but it lacked mobility, the chin was too strong, the grey eyes wanted expression, though they were ever on the watch for an admiring glance.

"The angel has come to pour oil upon the troubled waters," said the flabby, florid man, looking up from his cards at the splendid bar-maid.

Gentle Annie regarded the speaker boldly, smiled, and coloured with pleasure.

"To pour whisky down your throats," she said, laughing – "that would be nearer the mark."

"And produce a more pleasing effect," said Garsett.

"Attend to the game," said the American. "Spades are trumps."

"Pass," said the digger.

"Then down she goes," said the Englishman.

"Pass again," said the American.

"I make it Diamonds, and cross the blanky suit," said the digger.

Gentle Annie turned to the Father of Timber Town.

"There's a gentleman wants to see you, Mr. Crewe," she said.

"Very good, very good; bring him in – he has as much right here as I."

"He said he'd wait for you in the bar-parlour."

"But, my girl, I must watch the game: I have a five-pound note on it. Yes, a five-pound note!"

"Think of that, now," said Gentle Annie, running her bejewelled hand over her face. "You'll be bankrupt before morning. But never mind, old gentleman," – she deftly corrected the set of Mr. Crewe's coat, and fastened its top button – "you'll always find a friend and protector in *me*."

"My good girl, what a future! The tender mercies of bar-maids are cruel. 'The daughter of the horse-leech' – he! he! – where did you get all those rings from? – I don't often quote Scripture, but I find it knows all about women. Cathro, you must watch the game for me: I have to see a party in the bar. Watch the game, Cathro, watch the game."

The old gentleman, leaning heavily upon his stick, walked slowly to the door, and Gentle Annie, humming a tune, walked briskly before, in all the glory of exuberant health and youth.

When Mr. Crewe entered the bar-parlour he was confronted by the bulky figure of Benjamin Tresco, who was enjoying a glass of beer and the last issue of *The Pioneer Bushman*. Between the goldsmith's lips was the amber mouthpiece of a straight-stemmed briar pipe, a smile of contentment played over the breadth of his ruddy countenance, and his ejaculations were made under some deep and pleasurable excitement.

"By the living hokey! What times, eh?" He slapped his thigh with his heavy hand. "The town won't know itself! We'll all be

bloomin' millionaires. Ah! good evening, Mr. Crewe. Auspicious occasion. Happy to meet you, sir." Benjamin had risen, and was motioning the Father of Timber Town to a seat upon the couch, where he himself had been sitting. "You will perceive that I am enjoying a light refresher. Have something yourself at my expense, I beg."

Mr. Crewe's manner was very stiff. He knew Tresco well. It was not so much that he resented the goldsmith's familiar manner, as that, with the instinct of his *genus*, he suspected the unfolding of some money-making scheme for which he was to find the capital. Therefore he fairly bristled with caution.

"Thank you, nothing." He spoke with great dignity. "You sent for me. What do you wish to say, sir?"

Benjamin looked at the rich man through his spectacles, without which he found it impossible to read the masterpieces of the editor of *The Pioneer Bushman*; pursed his lips, to indicate that he hardly relished the old gentleman's manner; scrutinised the columns of the newspaper for a desired paragraph, on which, when found, he placed a substantial forefinger; and then, glancing at Mr. Crewe, he said abruptly, "Read that, boss," and puffed furiously at his pipe, while he watched the old man's face through a thick cloud of tobacco smoke.

Mr. Crewe read the paragraph; folded up the paper, and placed it on the couch beside him; looked at the ceiling; glanced round the room; turned his keen eyes on Tresco, and said: —

"Well, what of that? I saw that an hour ago. It's very fine, if

true; very fine, indeed."

"True, mister? *I* bought the gold *myself*! *I* gave the information to the 'buster'! Now, here is my plan. I know this gold is *new* gold – it's no relation to any gold I ever bought before. It comes from a virgin field. By the special knowledge I possess as a gold-buyer, I am able to say that; and you know when a virgin field yields readily as much as eighty-two ounces, the odds are in favour of it yielding thousands. Look at the Golden Bar. You remember that? – eight thousand ounces in two days, and the field's been worked ever since. Then there was Greenstone Gully – a man came into town with fifty ounces, and the party that tracked him made two thousand ounces within a month. Those finds were at a distance, but this one is a local affair. How do I know? – my special knowledge, mister; my intuitive reading of signs which prognosticate coming events; my knowledge of the characters and ways of diggers. All this I am willing to place at your disposal, on one condition, Mr. Crewe; and that condition is that we are partners in the speculation. I find the field – otherwise the partnership lapses – and you find me £200 and the little capital required. I engage to do my part within a week."

Mr. Crewe stroked his nose with his forefinger and thumb, as was his habit when in deep contemplation.

"But – ah – what if I were to tell you that I can find the field entirely by my own exertions? What do you say to that, Mr. Tresco? What do you say to that?"

"I say, sir, without the least hesitation, that you *never* will find

it. I say that you will spend money and valuable time in a wild-goose chase, whereas *I* shall be entirely successful."

"We shall see," said Mr. Crewe, rising from his seat, "we shall see. Don't try to coerce me, sir; don't try to coerce *me*!"

"I haven't the least desire in that direction." Benjamin's face assumed the expression of a cherub. "Nothing is further from my thoughts. I know of a good thing – my special knowledge qualifies me to make the most of it; I offer you the refusal of 'chipping in' with me, and you, I understand, refuse. Very well, Mr. Crewe, *I* am satisfied; *you* are satisfied; all is amicably settled. I go to place my offer where it will be accepted. Good evening, sir."

Benjamin put his nondescript, weather-worn hat on his semi-bald head, and departed with as much dignity as his ponderous person could assume.

"And now," said Mr. Crewe to himself, as the departing figure of the goldsmith disappeared, "we will go and see the result of our little bet; we will see whether we have lost or gained the sum of five pounds."

The old man, taking his stick firmly in his hand, stumped down the passage to the door of the room where the gamblers played, and, as he turned the handle, he was greeted with a torrent of shouts, high words, and the noise of a falling table.

There, on the floor, lay gold and bank notes, scattered in every direction amid broken chairs, playing cards, and struggling men.

Mr. Crewe paused on the threshold. In the whirl and dust

of the tumult he could discern the digger's wilderness of hair, the bulky form of Garsett, and the thin American, in a tangled, writhing mass. His friend Cathro was looking on with open mouth and trembling hands, ineffectual, inactive. But Scarlett, making a sudden rush into the melee, seized the lucky digger, and dragged him, infuriated, struggling, swearing, from the unwieldy Garsett, on whose throat his grimy fingers were tightly fixed.

"Well, well," exclaimed Mr. Crewe. "Landlord! landlord! Scarlett, be careful – you'll strangle that man!"

Scarlett pinioned the digger's arms from behind, and rendered him harmless; Garsett sat on the floor fingering his throat, and gasping; while Lichfield lay unconscious, with his head under the broken table.

"Fair play!" shouted the digger. "I've bin robbed. Le'me get at him. I'll break his blanky neck. Cheat a gen'leman at cards, will you? Le'me get at him. Le'go, I tell yer – who's quarrelling with *you*?" But he struggled in vain, for Scarlett's hold on him was tighter than a vice's.

"Stand quiet, man," he expostulated. "There was no cheating."

"The fat bloke fudged a card. I was pickin' up a quid from the floor – he fudged a card. Le'go o' me, an' I'll fight you fair."

"Stand quiet, I tell you, or you'll be handed over to the police."

The digger turned his hairy visage round, and glanced angrily into Jack's eyes.

"You'll call in the traps? – you long-legged swine!" With a mighty back-kick, the Prospector lodged the heel of his heavy

boot fairly on Scarlett's shin. In a moment he had struggled free, and faced round.

"Put up your fists!" he cried. "I fight fair, I fight fair."

There was a whirlwind of blows, and then a figure fell to the floor with a thud like that of a felled tree. It was the lucky digger, and he lay still and quiet amid the wreckage of the fight.

"Here," said Cathro, handing Mr. Crewe ten pounds. "Take your money – our friend the digger lost the game."

"This is most unfortunate, Cathro." But as he spoke, the Father of Timber Town pocketed the gold. "Did I not see Scarlett knock that man down? This is extremely unfortunate. I have just refused the offer of a man who avers – who avers, mind you – that he can put us on this new gold-field in a week, but I trusted to Scarlett's diplomacy with the digger: I come back, and what do I see? I see my friend Scarlett knock the man down! There he lies as insensible as a log."

"It looks," said Cathro, "as if our little plan had fallen through."

"Fallen through? We have made the unhappy error of interfering in a game of cards. We should have stood off, sir, and when a quarrel arose – I know these diggers; I have been one of them myself, and I understand them, Cathro – when a quarrel arose we should have interposed on behalf of the digger, and he would have been our friend for ever. Now all the gold in the country wouldn't bribe him to have dealings with us."

The noise of the fight had brought upon the scene all the

occupants of the bar. They stood in a group, silent and expectant, just inside the room. The landlord, who was with them, came forward, and bent over the inanimate form of the Prospector. "I think this is likely to be a case for the police," said he, as he rose, and stood erect. "The man may be alive, or he may be dead – I'm not a doctor: I can't tell – but there's likely to be trouble in store for the gentlemen in the room at the time of the fight."

Suddenly an energetic figure pushed its way through the group of spectators, and Benjamin Tresco, wearing an air of supreme wisdom, and with a manner which would not have disgraced a medico celebrated for his "good bedside manner," commenced to examine the prostrate man. First, he unbuttoned the insensible digger's waistcoat, and placed his hand over his heart; next, he felt his pulse. "This man," he said deliberately, like an oracle, "has been grossly manhandled; he is seriously injured, but with care we shall pull him round. My dear" – to Gentle Annie, who stood at his elbow, in her silks and jewels, the personification of Folly at a funeral – "a drop of your very best brandy – real cognac, mind you, and be as quick as you possibly can."

With the help of Scarlett, Tresco placed the digger upon the couch. In the midst of this operation the big card-player and his attenuated accomplice, whose unconsciousness had been more feigned than actual, were about to slip from the room, when Mr. Crewe's voice was heard loudly above the chatter, "Stop! stop those men, there!" The old gentleman's stick was pointed dramatically towards the retreating figures. "They know more

about this affair than is good for them."

Four or five men immediately seized Garsett and Lichfield, led them back to the centre of the room, and stood guard over them.

At this moment, Gentle Annie re-entered with the *eau de vie*; and Tresco, who was bustling importantly about his patient, administrated the restorative dexterously to the unconscious digger, and then awaited results. He stood, with one hand on the man's forehead and the other he held free to gesticulate with, in emphasis of his speech: —

"This gentleman is going to recover – with proper care, and in skilled hands. He has received a severe contusion on the cranium, but apart from that he is not much the worse for his 'scrap.' See, he opens his eyes. Ah! they are closed again. There! – they open again. He is coming round. In a few minutes he will be his old, breathing, pulsating self. The least that can be expected in the circumstances, is that the gentlemen implicated, who have thus been saved most disagreeable consequences by the timely interference of skilled hands, the least they can do is to shout drinks for the crowd."

He paused, and a seraphic smile lighted his broad face.

"Hear, hear!" cried a voice from behind the spectators by the door.

"Just what the doctor ordered," said another.

"There's enough money on the floor," remarked a third, "for the whole lot of us to swim in champagne."

"My eye's on it," said Tresco. "It's what gave me my inspiration. The lady will pick it up while you name your drinks to the landlord. Mine's this liqueur brandy, neat. Let the lady pick up those notes there: a lady has a soul above suspicion – let her collect the money, and we'll hold a court of enquiry when this gentleman here is able to give his evidence."

The digger was now gazing in a befogged manner at the faces around him; and Gentle Annie, having collected all the money of the gamblers in a tray, placed it on the small table which stood against the wall.

"Now, doctor," said a tall man with a tawny beard, "take your fee; it's you restored the gent. Take your fee: is it two guineas, or do you make it five?"

"'Doctor,' did you say? No, Moonlight, my respected friend, I scorn the title. Doctors are a brood that batten on the ills of others. First day: 'A pain internally, madam? Very serious. I will send you some medicine. Two guineas. Yes, the sum of two guineas.' Next day: 'Ah, the pain is no better, madam? Go on taking the medicine. Fee? Two guineas, *if* you please.' And so on till the pain cures itself. If not, the patient grows worse, dies, is buried, and the doctor's fees accrue proportionately. But we will suppose that the patient has some incurable tumour. The doctor comes, examines, looks wise, shakes his head, says the only chance is to operate; but it will be touch and go, just a toss up. He gets his knives, opens up the patient, and by good luck touches no vital part. Then the patient is saved, and it's 'My

work, gentlemen, entirely my work. That's what skill will do. My fee is forty-five guineas.' That's how he makes up for the folks that don't pay. Doctor, *me*? No, Moonlight, my friend, I am a practitioner who treats for love. No fee; no fee at all. But, Annie, my dear, I'll trouble you for that glass of brandy."

The digger was contemplating Tresco's face with a look of bewildered astonishment. "An' who the blanky blank are *you*?" he exclaimed, with all his native uncouthness. "What the blank do you want to take my clo'es off of me for? Who the blue infernal – " All eyes were fixed on his contused countenance and the enormous bump on his temple. "Ah! there's the gent that shook me of five quid. I'll remember you, old party. An' as for you two spielers – you thought to fleece me. I'll give you what for! An' there's the other toff, 'im that biffed me. Fancy bein' flattened out by a toney remittance man! Wonderful. I call it British pluck, real bull-dog courage – three to one, an' me the littlest of the lot, bar one. Oh, it's grand. It pays a man to keep his mouth shut, when he comes to Timber Town with money in his pocket."

The eyes of the spectators began to turn angrily upon Lichfield and Garsett, who, looking guilty as thieves, stood uneasy and apart; but Scarlett stepped forward, and was about to speak in self-defence, when Mr. Crewe offered to explain the situation.

"I ask you to listen to me for one moment," he said; "I ask you to take my explanation as that of a disinterested party, a mere looker on. These three gentlemen" – he pointed to the three euchre players – "were having a game of cards, quite a

friendly game of cards, in which a considerable sum of money was changing hands. My friend Scarlett, here, was looking on with me, when for some cause a quarrel arose. Next thing, the gentleman here on the sofa was attacking his opponents in the game with an empty bottle – you can see the pieces of broken glass amongst the cards upon the floor. Now, a bottle is a very dangerous weapon, a very dangerous weapon indeed; I might say a deadly weapon. Then it was that Mr. Scarlett interfered. He pulled off our friend, and was attacked – I saw this with my own eyes – attacked violently, and in self-defence he struck this gentleman, and inadvertently stunned him. That, I assure you, is exactly how the case stands. No great damage is done. The difference is settled, and, of course, the game is over."

"An' '*e*," said the digger, raising himself to a sitting posture, "'*e* shook me for five quid. The wily ol'e serpint. 'E never done nothin' – 'e only shook me for five quid."

"Count the money into three equal parts, landlord," said the Father of Timber Town. "It's perfectly true, I *did* relieve the gentleman of five pounds; but it was the result of a bet, of a bet he himself insisted on. He would have made it even heavier, had I allowed him. But here is the money – he can have it back. I return it. I bet with no man who begrudges to pay money he fairly loses; but I have no further dealings with such a man."

"Oh, you think I want the blanky money, do you?" cried the digger. "You're the ol'e gen'leman as is said to own the crimson town, ain't you? Well, keep that five quid, an' 'elp to paint it

crimsoner. *I* don't want the money. *I* can get plenty more where it came from, just for the pickin' of it up. You keep it, ol'e feller, an' by an' by I'll come and buy the town clean over your head."

"Give the patient some more brandy, my dear." Tresco's voice sounded as sonorous as a parson's. "Now he's talkin'. And what will you do with the town when you've bought it, my enterprising friend?"

"I'll turn the present crowd out – they're too mean to live. I'll sell it to a set of Chinamen, or niggers. I'd prefer 'em."

"These are the ravings of delirium," said Tresco. "I ask you to pay no attention to such expressions. We frequently hear things of this sort in the profession, but we let them pass. He'll be better in the morning."

"Is the money divided?" asked Mr. Crewe.

"Yes," said the landlord. "One hundred and twenty-five pounds and sixpence in each lot."

"Mr. Garsett," said the Father of Timber Town, the tone of command in his voice, "come and take your money. Mr. Lichfield, take yours, sir."

Still agitated and confused, the two gamblers came forward, took their shares, and pocketed notes and gold with trembling hands.

"Give your friend his, Tresco," said the venerable arbitrator.

"Here's your winnings, or your losings," said the goldsmith to the digger. "It don't matter what name you call 'em by, but tuck it safely away agin your brisket. And when next you strike it rich,

take my advice: put it in the bank, an' keep it there."

The digger took the money in his open hands, placed scoopwise together, and said, "All this mine, is it? You're too kind. What do *I* want the blanky money for, eh? Didn't I tell you I could get money for the pickin' of it up? Well, you're all a pretty measly crowd, all as poor as church rats, by the manners of yer. Well, *you* pick it up." And he flung the money among the crowd, lay back on the couch, and closed his eyes.

There was a scurry, and a scrambling on the floor, in the doorway, and in the passage outside.

Amid the tumult, Garsett and the American slunk off unperceived, while Tresco and Mr. Crewe, the landlord, Gentle Annie and Scarlett remained spectators of the scene.

Soon all was hushed and still, and they were left alone with the eccentric digger; but presently the tall figure of Moonlight, the man with the tawny beard, reappeared.

"Here's fifty pound, anyway," he said, placing a quantity of notes and gold in the landlord's hands. "Some I picked up myself, some I took off a blackguard I knocked over in the passage. Take the lot, and give it back to this semi-lunatic when he suffers his recovery in the morning. Good-night, gentlemen; I wish you the pleasures of the evening." So saying, the man with the tawny beard disappeared, and it was not long before Tresco was left alone with his patient.

# CHAPTER VIII

## The Yellow Flag

The harbour of Timber Town was formed by a low-lying island shaped like a long lizard, which stretched itself across an indentation in the coast-line, and the tail of which joined the mainland at low tide, while the channel between its head and the opposing cliffs was deep, practicable, and safe.

Immediately opposite this end of the island the wharves and quays of Timber Town stretched along the shore, backed by hills which were dotted with painted wooden houses, nestling amid bowers of trees. Beyond these hills lay Timber Town itself, invisible, sheltered, at the bottom of its basin.

The day was hot, clear and still; the water lapped the shore lazily, and the refracted atmosphere shimmered with heat, wherever the sea touched the land.

A little dingey put off from the shore. It contained two men, one of whom sat in the stern while the other pulled. Silently over the surface of the calm, blue water the little craft skimmed. It passed through a small fleet of yachts and pleasure-boats moored under the lee of the protecting island, and presently touched the pebbles of a miniature beach.

Out stepped the Pilot of Timber Town and Captain Sartoris.

"An' you call this blazin' climate o' yours temperate," exclaimed the shipwrecked mariner.

"Heat?" said the Pilot, making the painter of the boat fast to some rusty bits of iron that lay on the shore; "you call this heat, with the sea-breeze risin', and the island cooling like a bottle of champagne in an ice-chest. It's plain to see, Sartoris, you're a packet-rat that never sailed nowhere except across the Western Ocean, in an' out o' Liverpool and New York." They had approached the end of the island, and overlooked the harbour entrance. "Now, this is where I intend to place the beacon. What do you think of it?" Sartoris assumed the manner and expression of supreme interest, but said nothing. "Them two leading lights are all very well in their way, but this beacon, with the near one, will give a line that will take you outside o' that sunken reef which stretches a'most into the fairway; and a vessel 'll be able to come in, scientific and safe, just like a lady into a drawing-room."

With a seaman's eye Sartoris took in the situation at a glance. "Very pretty," he said, "very neat. A lovely little toy port, such as you see at the theayter. It only wants the chorus o' fisher girls warbling on that there beach road, and the pirate brig bringing-to just opposite, an' the thing would be complete."

"Eh! What?" ejaculated the Pilot. "What's this play-goin' gammon? You talk like a schoolboy that's fed on jam tarts and novelettes, Sartoris. Let's talk sense. Have you ever heard of an occulting light?"

"No, certainly not; not by that name, anyhow."

"D'you know what an apparent light is?"

"No, but I know plenty of apparent fools."

"An apparent light is a most ingenious contraption."

"I've no doubt."

"It's a optical delusion, and makes two lights o' one – one on shore, which is the real one, and one here, which is the deception." But while the Pilot went on to talk of base plates, lewis bats, and all the paraphernalia of his craft, the skipper's eye was fixed on a string of little islands which stood off the end of the western arm of the great bay outside.

"Now, I never saw those when I was coming in," said he. "Where did you get them islands from, Summerhayes? Are they occulting, real, or apparent? Changing your landmarks, like this, is deceiving."

The Pilot, forgetting the technicalities of his profession, looked at the phenomenon which puzzled the skipper, and said, as gruffly as a bear, "That's no islands: it's but a bit of a mirage. Sometimes there's only one island, sometimes three, sometimes more – it's accordin' to circumstances. But what's this craft coming down the bay? Barque or ship, Sartoris? – I've forgot me glass."

Both men stood on the seaward edge of the island, and looked long and hard at the approaching vessel.

"Barque," said Sartoris, whose eyes were keener than the older man's.

"There's no barque due at this port for a month," said the Pilot. "The consignees keep me posted up, for to encourage a sharp lookout. The *Ida Bell* should arrive from London towards the middle of next month, but *she* is a ship. This must be a stranger, putting in for water or stores; or maybe she's short-handed."

For a long time they watched the big craft, sailing before the breeze.

"Sartoris, she's clewing up her courses and pulling down her head-sails."

"Isn't she a trifle far out, Pilot?"

"It's good holding-ground out there – stiff clay that would hold anything. What did I tell you? – there you are – coming-to. She's got starn-board. There goes the anchor!"

The skipper had hitherto displayed but little interest in the strange vessel, but now he was shouting and gesticulating, as a flag was run up to her fore-truck.

"Look at that, Summerhayes!" he exclaimed. "If you ain't blind, tell me what that flag is. Sure as I'm a master without a ship, it's the currantine flag."

"So it is, so it is. That means the Health Officer, Sartoris." And the gruff old Pilot hastened down to the dingey.

As the two seamen put off from the island, the skipper, who was in the stern of the little boat, could see Summerhayes's crew standing about on the slip of the pilot-shed; and by the time the dingey had reached the shore, the Pilot's big whale-boat lay by the landing-stage.

"Where's the doctor?" roared Summerhayes. "Is he goin' to make us hunt for him when he's required for the first time this six weeks?"

"All right, all right," called a clear voice from inside the great shed. "I'm ready before you are this time, Pilot."

"An' well you are," growled the gruff old barnacle. "That furrin'-lookin' barque outside has hoisted the yellow flag. Get aboard, lads, get aboard."

"Your men discovered the fact half an hour ago, by the aid of your telescope." The doctor came slowly down the slip, carrying a leather hand-bag.

"If you've any mercy," said the Pilot, "you'll spare 'em the use o' that. Men die fast enough without physic."

"Next time you get the sciatica, Summerhayes, I'll give you a double dose."

"An' charge me a double fee. I know you. Shove her off, Johnson."

The grim old Pilot stood with the steering-oar in his hand; the skipper and the doctor sitting on either hand of him, and the crew pulling as only a trained crew can.

"Steady, men," said the Pilot: "it's only half tide, and there's plenty of water coming in at the entrance. Keep your wind for that, Hendricson."

With one hand he unbuttoned the flap of his capacious trouser-pocket, and took out a small bunch of keys, which he handed to Sartoris.

"Examine the locker," he said. "It's the middle-sized key." The captain, in a moment, had opened the padlock which fastened the locker under the Pilot's seat.

"Is there half-a-dozen of beer – quarts?" asked Summerhayes.

"There is," replied Sartoris.

"Two bottles of rum?"

"Yes."

"Glasses?"

"Four."

"An' a corkscrew?"

"It's here."

"Then we've just what the doctor ordered: not this doctor – make no mistake o' that. An' them sons o' sea cooks, forrard there, haven't yet found a duplicate key to my locker. Wonderful! wonderful!"

The crew grinned, and put their backs into every stroke, for they knew "the old man" meant that they shouldn't go dry.

"I'm the Pilot o' this here port, eh?"

"Most certainly," said the doctor.

"An' Harbour Master, in a manner o' speaking?"

"That's so."

"And captain o' this here boat?"

They were hugging the shore of the island, where the strength of the incoming tide began to be felt in the narrow tortuous channel. The bluff old Pilot put the steering-oar to port, and brought his boat round to starboard, in order to keep her out of

the strongest part of the current.

"Now, lads, shake her up!" he shouted.

The men strained every nerve, and the boat was forced slowly against the tide. With another sudden movement of the steering-oar Summerhayes brought the boat into an eddy under the island, and she shot forward.

"Very well," he said; "it's acknowledged that I'm all that – Pilot, Harbour Master, and skipper o' this boat. Then let me tell you that I'm ship's doctor as well, and in that capacity, since we're outside and there's easy going now under sail, I prescribe a good stiff glass all round, as a preventive against plague, Yellow Jack, small-pox, or whatever disease it is they've got on yonder barque."

Sartoris uncorked a bottle, and handed a glass to the doctor.

"And a very good prescription, too," said the tall, thin medico, who had a colourless complexion and eyes that glittered like black beads; "but where's the water?"

"Who drinks on my boat," growled the Pilot, "drinks his liquor neat. I drown no man and no rum with water. If a man must needs spoil his liquor, let him bring his own water: there's none in my locker."

The doctor took the old seaman's medicine, but not without a wry face; Sartoris followed suit, and then the Pilot. The boat was now under sail, and the crew laid in their oars and "spliced the main brace."

"That's the only medicine we favour in this boat or in this

service," said the Pilot, as he returned the key of the locker to his pocket, "an' we've never yet found it to fail. Before encount'ring plague, or after encount'ring dirty weather, a glass all round: at other times the locker is kept securely fastened, and I keep the key." Saying which, he buttoned the flap of his pocket, and fixed his eyes on the strange barque, to which they were now drawing near.

It could be seen that she was a long time "out"; her sails, not yet all furled, were old and weather-worn; her sides badly needed paint; and as she rose and fell with the swell, she showed barnacles and "grass" below the water-line. At her mizzen-peak flew the American ensign, and at the fore-truck the ominous quarantine flag.

As the boat passed under the stern, the name of the vessel could be seen – "*Fred P. Lincoln*, New York" – and a sickly brown man looked over the side. Soon he was joined by more men, brown and yellow, who jabbered like monkeys, but did nothing.

"Seems they've got a menag'ry aboard," commented Sartoris.

Presently a white face appeared at the side.

"Where's the captain?" asked the Health Officer.

"With the mate, who's dying."

"Then who are you?"

"Cap'n's servant."

"But where's the other mate?"

"He died a week ago."

"What's wrong on board?"

"Don't know, sir. Ten men are dead, and three are sick."

"Where are you from?"

"Canton."

"Canton? Have you got plague aboard?"

"Not bubonic. The men go off quiet and gradual, after being sick a long time. I guess you'd better come aboard, and see for yourself."

The ladder was put over the side, and soon the doctor had clambered on board.

The men in the boat sat quiet and full of contemplation.

"This is a good time for a smoke," said the Pilot, filling his pipe and passing his tobacco tin forrard. "And I think, Sartoris, all hands 'd be none the worse for another dose o' my medicine." Again his capacious hand went into his more capacious pocket, and the key of the locker was handed to Sartoris.

"Some foolish people are teetotal," continued Summerhayes, "and would make a man believe as how every blessed drop o' grog he drinks shortens his life by a day or a week, as the case may be. But give me a glass o' liquor an' rob me of a month, rather than the plagues o' China strike me dead to-morrer. Some folks have no more sense than barn-door fowls."

A yellow man, more loquacious than his fellows, had attracted the attention of Sartoris.

"Heh! John. What's the name of your skipper?"

The Chinaman's reply was unintelligible. "I can make nothing

of him," said Sartoris. But, just at that moment, the man who had described himself as the captain's servant reappeared at the side of the ship.

"My man," said Summerhayes, "who's your captain?"

"Cap'n Starbruck."

"Starbruck!" exclaimed Sartoris. "I know him." In a moment he was half-way up the ladder.

"Hi! Sartoris," roared the Pilot. "If you go aboard that vessel, you'll stay there till she's got a clean bill o' health."

"I'm going to help my old shipmate," answered Sartoris from the top of the ladder. "Turn and turn about, I says. He stood by me in the West Indies, when I had Yellow Jack; and I stand by him now." As he spoke his foot was on the main-rail. He jumped into the waist of the quarantined barque, and was lost to sight.

"Whew!" said the Pilot to the vessel's side. "Here's a man just saved from shipwreck, and he must plunge into a fever-den in order to be happy. I wash my hands of such foolishness. Let 'im go, let 'im go."

The thin, neat doctor appeared, standing on the main-rail. He handed his bag to one of the boat's crew, and slowly descended the ladder.

"An' what have you done with Sartoris?" asked the Pilot.

"He's aboard," replied the doctor, "and there he stops. That's all I can say."

"And what's the sickness?"

"Ten men are dead, five more are down – two women,

Chinese, and three men. I should call it fever, a kind of barbiers or beri-beri. But in the meanwhile, I'll take another drop of your excellent liquor."

The doctor drank the Pilot's medicine in complete silence.

"Let go that rope!" roared Summerhayes. "Shove her off. Up with your sail." The trim boat shot towards the sunny port of Timber Town, and Sartoris was left aboard the fever-ship.

# CHAPTER IX

## What Looked Like Courting

On the terrace of the Pilot's house was a garden-seat, on which sat Rose Summerhayes and Scarlett.

Rose was looking at her dainty shoe, the point of which protruded from beneath her skirt; while Scarlett's eyes were fixed on the magnificent panorama of mountains which stretched north and south as far as he could see.

Behind the grass-covered foot-hills, at whose base crouched the little town, there stood bolder and more rugged heights. In rear of these rose the twin forest-clad tops of an enormous mountain mass, on either side of which stretched pinnacled ranges covered with primeval "bush."

Scarlett was counting hill and mountain summits. His enumeration had reached twenty distinct heights, when, losing count, he turned to his companion.

"It's a lovely picture to have in front of your door," he said, "a picture that never tires the eye."

A break in the centre of the foot-hills suddenly attracted his attention. It was the gorge through which a rippling, sparkling river escaped from the mountain rampart and flowed through the

town to the tidal waters of the harbour.

"That valley will take us into the heart of the hills," he said. "We start to-morrow morning, soon after dawn – Moonlight and I. Do you know him?"

The girl looked up from her shoe, and smiled. "I can't cultivate the acquaintance of every digger in the town," she replied.

"Don't speak disparagingly of diggers. *I* become one to-morrow."

"Then, mind you bring me a big nugget when you come back," said the girl.

"That's asking me to command good luck. Give me that, and you shall have the nugget."

"Does luck go by a girl's favour? If it did, you would be sure to have it."

"I never had it on the voyage out, did I?"

"Perhaps you never had the other either."

"That's true – I left England through lack of it."

"I shouldn't have guessed that. Perhaps you'll gain it in this country."

Scarlett looked at her, but her eyes were again fixed on the point of her shoe.

"Well, Rosebud – flirting as usual?" Captain Summerhayes, clad in blue serge, with his peaked cap on the back of his head, came labouring up the path, and sat heavily on the garden-seat. "I never see such a gal – always with the boys when she ought to be cooking the dinner."

"Father!" exclaimed Rose, flushing red, though she well knew the form that the Pilot's chaff usually took. "How *can* you tell such fibs? You forget that Mr. Scarlett is not one of the old cronies who understand your fun."

"There, there, my gal." The Pilot laid his great brown hand on his daughter's shoulder. "Don't be ruffled. Let an old sailor have his joke: it won't hurt, God bless us; it won't hurt more'n the buzzing of a blue-bottle fly. But you're that prim and proper, that staid and straight-laced, you make me tease you, just to rouse you up. Oh! them calm ones, Mr. Scarlett, beware of 'em. It takes a lot to goad 'em to it, but once their hair's on end, it's time a sailor went to sea, and a landsman took to the bush. It's simply terrible. Them mild 'uns, Mr. Scarlett, beware of 'em."

"Father, do stop!" cried Rose, slapping the Pilot's broad back with her soft, white hand.

"All right," said her father, shrinking from her in mock dread; "stop that hammerin'."

"Tell us about the fever-ship, and what they're doing with Sartoris," said Scarlett.

"Lor', she's knocked the breath out of a man's body. I'm just in dread o' me life. Sit t'other end o' the seat, gal; and do you, Mr. Scarlett, sit in between us, and keep the peace. It's fearful, this livin' alone with a dar'ter that thumps me." The old fellow chuckled internally, and threatened to explode with suppressed merriment. "Some day I shall die o' laffing," he said, as he pulled himself together. "But you was asking about Sartoris." He had

now got himself well in hand. “Sartoris is like a pet monkey in a cage, along o’ Chinamen, Malays, Seedee boys, and all them sort of animals. Laff? You should ha’ seen me standing up in the boat, hollerin’ at Sartoris, and laffin’ so as I couldn’t hardly keep me feet. ‘Sartoris,’ I says, ‘when do the animals feed?’ An’ he looks over the rail, just like a stuffed owl in a glass case, and says nothing. I took a bottle from the boat’s locker, and held it up. ‘What wouldn’t you give for a drop o’ that!’ I shouts. But he shook his fist, and said something disrespectful about port wine; but I was that roused up with the humour o’ the thing, I laffed so as I had to set down. A prisoner for full four weeks, or durin’ the pleasure o’ the Health Officer, that’s Sartoris. Lord! *what* a trap to be caught in.”

“But what’s the disease they’ve on board?” asked Scarlett.

“That’s where it is,” replied the Pilot – “nobody seems to know. The Health Officer he says one thing, and then, first one medical and then another must put his oar in, and say it’s something else – dengey fever, break-bone, spirrilum fever, beri-beri, or anything you like. One doctor says the ship shouldn’t ha’ bin currantined, and another says she should, and so they go on quarrelling like a lot o’ cats in a sack.”

“But there have been deaths on board,” said Rose.

“Deaths, my dear? The first mate’s gone, and more’n half the piebald crew. This morning we buried the Chinese cook. You won’t see Sartoris, not this month or more.”

“Mr. Scarlett is going into the bush, father. He’s not likely to

be back till after the ship is out of quarantine."

"Eh? What? Goin' bush-whacking? I thought you was town-bred. Well, well, so you're goin' to help chop down trees."

Scarlett smiled. "You've heard of this gold that's been found, Pilot?"

"I see it in the paper."

"I'm going to try if I can find where it comes from."

"Lord love 'ee, but you've no luck, lad. This gold-finding is just a matter o' luck, and luck goes by streaks. You're in a bad streak, just at present; and you won't never find that gold till you're out o' that streak. You can try, but you won't get it. You see, Sartoris is in the same streak – no sooner does he get wrecked than he is shut up aboard this fever-ship. And s'far as I can see, he'll get on no better till he's out o' his streak too. You be careful how you go about for the next six months or so, for as sure as you're born, if you put yourself in the way of it, you'll have some worse misfortune than any you've yet met with. Luck's like the tide – you can do nothing agin it; but when it turns, you've got everything in your favour. Wait till the tide of your luck turns, young man, before you attempt anything rash. That's my advice, and I've seen proof of it in every quarter of the globe."

"Father is full of all sorts of sailor-superstitions. He hates to take a ship out of port on a Friday, and wouldn't kill an albatross for anything."

"We caught three on the voyage out," said Scarlett; "a Wandering Albatross, after sighting the Cape of Good Hope, and

two sooty ones near the Campbell Islands. I kept the wing-bones, and would have given you one for a pipe-stem, Captain, if the ship had reached port."

"But she didn't, my lad," growled the Pilot, "and that's where the point comes in. Why sailors can't leave them birds alone astonishes me: they don't hurt nobody, and they don't molest the ship, but sail along out of pure love o' company. On the strength o' that you must kill 'em, just for a few feathers and stems for tobacco-pipes. And you got wrecked. P'r'aps you'll leave 'em alone next voyage."

During the last part of the conversation, Rose had risen, and entered the house. She now returned with a small leather case in her hand.

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