

Brown's reserve was breaking down. His hands seemed to be trembling a little, and there were other signs of anxiety about him.

"I don't know why you have made me that offer, sir," he said. "There must be plenty of men more fitted to be the recipient of it."

"It is, at least, wholly unconditional," and Brown made a little gesture that curiously became him. "I may say that I had already satisfied myself about you, or I should never have made it."

"Then," said Austin, a trifle hoarsely, "I can only thank you—and endeavour to give you no cause for being sorry afterwards that you fixed on me."

They had a little more to say, but the nurse appeared during the course of it an dinformed Brown that the surgeon was coming to dress Austin's arm.

"Just a minute," said the latter. "Will you be kind enough to pass me that pad and pencil?"

She gave it to him, and he scribbled hastily, and then tore off the sheet and handed it to Brown.

"I wonder if that message meets with your approval, sir?" he said.

Brown put on his glasses, and smiled as he read: "Miss Brown, Casa-Brown, Las Palmas. Ran away without a cause. Almost well. May I come back as your father's partner?"

Brown chuckled softly, though there was a curious and somewhat unusual gentleness in his eyes.

"It has my full approbation, though, considering the cable company's charges, isn't it a trifle loquacious?"

"Does that matter?" asked Austin.

Brown laughed, and grasped the hand he held out. "No," he said, "I don't suppose it does. After all, these things only happen once in the average lifetime. Well, I must