

Joey's eyes sparkled; a wild hope suddenly possessed him. "Come down to the flats to-day, Jarge," he pleaded. "There's muskrats and rooks and turtles, and sometimes woodchucks. You'll eat your bread and cheese, and drink your Bass, and —"

Sir George started, then drew himself up with a pitying smile. "No, no," he said gently. "You forget, Joey, that I—besides, I have an important engagement. I am on my way to address the meeting of the Combined Philanthropists in the Reformatory building. I couldn't disappoint two thousand people."

"And if you wasn't there," said Joey, with a certain dogged fierceness, "what'd happen?"

"Well," began Sir George, then his air of importance vanished in a meditative smile. "I suppose," he went on, "the chairman would announce that owing to the unexpected absence of—the principal speaker, he would have the pleasure of calling upon Mr. Theophilus Blank, a gentleman whose scholarly attainments are only exceeded by the modesty which makes his appearance on a public platform so rare an event. Bah! Joey. I've been chairman, and I know the whole shibboleth."

"Exactly," said Joey. "Same as if I didn't turn up at the main drain on Monday at seven. 'Boss'd call out Joey Porley missin'—Dan Kelley take his pick and shovel.' You come along with me, Jarge. When we sloped afore we allus had the most fun. We'll set the empty bottles up to shoot, same as we used to."

There was a momentary flash in Sir George's eyes that would have meant mischief in the old days, and even now people found him unexpected sometimes, but it died away as he stood up. He must get off at the next corner to go to the Reformatory. Joey was beaten, but, like a true Briton, he pretended that he didn't know it. He fished in another pocket, and brought out a tiny powder flask and a greasy little leather bag of shot, laying them silently on his knee. Sir George looked from them to the plump rosy face that was becoming lined and twisted. Suddenly the thought of the yawning gulf that divided them overwhelmed him—a gulf wider than all the years that lay between their vanished boyhood and the present. "Joey," he said, sitting down again, "I'll go."

The car stopped at the terminus; the motorman whistled softly as he watched the two men cross a narrow strip of vacant land by a faintly marked path that dipped over the edge of a ravine. They stood looking down on the tops of the trees that were rooted in the valley. Far below a footbridge spanned a rushing muddy stream; beyond, stretching away into a radiant misty glow of diffused sunlight, lay the Delectable Land.

They picked their way down the ravine, Joey in the lead, puffing noisily; Sir George following cautiously as he steadied himself with his cane. The city might have been a hundred miles away, for there was no sight nor sound to indicate its neighborhood. In this sheltered valley no wind stirred the budding trees, but the air was filled with the sound of running water—a sound that recalled the keen delight of other days, when the coming of spring meant more than a change of season. Sir George sniffed like a long-stabled horse; Joey turned his head with a look of radiant delight. Sir George smiled responsively; a smile that faded into a half-cynical, half-wondering glance at Joey's back. Last year's dead leaves and twigs cracked under their feet, and the moist warm breath of the awakening earth drifted upwards in soft pulsations. They reached the lower level, and, without a word halted before a dry log that lay invitingly in the sunshine, on the edge of the stream, instead of crossing the bridge. Sir George

sighed and sat down contentedly; so also did Joey. They gazed long at the bubbling, gurgling water, in dreamy contemplation. Sir George's mind went back with a leap to the hours he had spent in this way, long ago. Then, as now, he would drop into a reverie, forgetting his companion, intent only on working out ambitious plans for the future. Joey had never had any share in them, nor any ambitions of his own, beyond becoming a ditch digger like his father, and earning a few shillings a day. Poor Joey! But this time, as Sir George looked down at the swirling water, he had no plans to make; he could only review a life that was nearly over. It had been successful beyond anything he could have imagined in his youth, yet what did it all amount to in the end? His career in the army and diplomatic service had left him a few ribbons and clasps; as governor of a crown colony he had achieved distinction; but now he was simply ex-everything-of-any-consequence. A carefully modelled, well-preserved figure-head to society in this Canadian city; a sort of honorary president whose sole duty it was to shuffle his stock of felicitous phrases by saying exactly what people expected him to say in his public addresses.

He dug his cane viciously into the bark of the log. A loose piece of bark dropped into the water, heading down stream like a tiny boat. In an instant his mood changed; he leaned forward, watching eagerly to see if it would be caught by an eddy or pass safely under the bridge. Joey, too, followed its course with breathless interest, until it swung clear and passed out of sight. Sir George hastily tore off another piece; so did Joey. "One—two—three—" counted Sir George, and at the word they both launched their boats. This time it was much more exciting. Joey's boat leaped ahead, but Sir George's bore down upon it and nosed it aside into an eddy, winning the race. Sir George was elated; then depressed at the next trial when Joey's reached the goal first. But his luck could not long desert him, and, at the end, Joey could only claim the one success.

A squirrel chattered noisily from a near-by tree. The men looked at each other. Joey's face was doubtful and enquiring; Sir George's grave and impenetrable. Joey gulped; then took the pistol from his pocket. Sir George watched him with a frown as he clumsily loaded the weapon. The squirrel ran out on an overhanging limb, peering down with curious glittering eyes. Joey glanced upwards, his fingers trembling with nervous haste as he rammed the wadding home. Sir George's frown deepened. "Joey," he burst forth fiercely, "why do you want to shoot that innocent little beast?"

It was the one thing that Joey did not want to do. He was willing in his character of host, to allow his guest to amuse himself in the old way, although he squirmed with apprehension at the thought of the sacrifice. No wonder he stared in bewilderment. Sir George's score in the slaughter stood, in comparison to his, as a thousand to one. His turn had always come second, and by that time the game had either fallen to his playmate or escaped. Besides, it is doubtful if Joey ever could have learned to hit anything smaller than a cow, although he had cultivated a certain degree of skill in clubbing frogs. He knew nothing of the subtle transmuting power of old age, but did know that something impelled him to gently help every stray frog to safety that he happened to find in his ditches, and he was relieved to know that his companion had also grown tender-hearted. The superabundant life of the riotous little creature that in their boyhood would have roused the keenest desire for its destruction now awakened only a feeling of remorse.