

"Give me an answer, sir!" The words came like a pistol shot.

"Hearken!" the reply cracked back. "My unexpected lifter of trap-doors, my bolt from the blue—my—my *deus ex machina*—if I choose to stay here, I stay, if I desire to go, then I obey my desire."

"Be quick, man, there is no time for chatter. Promise to help me and you shall escape."

"I make no promises in the dark, but I will come up, and we'll see if we cannot arrive at an agreeable arrangement."

He overturned the broken cask, stood upon it, then raised himself through the opening. The stranger made no offer to help him. The Wayfarer stood and looked at him, with the air of one judging a horse, and found him a tall, stone-faced man, with eyes as hard as diamonds. His frame was athletic, and the close-fitting corduroy suit gave an impression of hardy litheness. His face was bronzed by weather, and wore a close-trimmed beard. He had a pistol in his hand and another in his belt.

"To whom do I owe—and so forth?" glibly queried the Wayfarer.

The stranger answered by showing an exciseman's license.

"Ah!" said the Wayfarer, "I must apologize for trespassing in your private sanctum. It was you, then, whom I had the brief honour of impersonating?"

"Come, no banter," snapped the exciseman. "Who are you?"

"My name is Caprice—I am the King of—but no—I fear your sense of humour is not large enough to relish it. However, you spoke of a service. What is it? I presume you heard the gentle threats those merry fellows showered upon me—I beg your pardon, you!"

They were both standing in the doorway.

"Yes, I heard, and know everything. Take this gun. In half-an-hour they will be back. We will post behind those rocks and get them just

as they are going from the landing into the hut."

"Get them?"

"Shoot them—we cannot miss at that range."

"Tell me—do you think they were sincere—I mean about that open boat?"

The exciseman smiled grimly.

"Two more questions—Lieutenant, isn't it?—then I'm ready for you. Did you know the trap I was walking into?"

The exciseman nodded, with a hellish smile.

"And did you really, my dear Lieutenant—did you actually shoot the captain's brother, as he lay tied there in the boat?"

"Why not?"

"I see you are a brave gentleman who deserves to gain his end. Close the trap-door and we will take our ambush."

The exciseman leaned down to lower the door, and the Wayfarer pushed him into the pit. There was one hoarse scream, as the trap-door fell with a slam, then silence.

"Yes," said the Wayfarer, "you are certainly a gentleman who deserves to gain his end."

Then he walked to the table, pocketed a handful of biscuits, closed the door of the hut, and strode back swiftly across the plateau.

### III.

"Was I biased against that fellow because he was an exciseman?" mused the Wayfarer. "No, I think not. I believe I would have done the same for a fellow-worshipper. By blazes! I am sure a fellow-worshipper could not earn a fate like that. Perhaps he broke his neck, when I pushed—when he fell into the cellar. I hope—come, come, no sentiment—gad! I was almost sorry for him then. 'T would be a waste of pity. Poetic justice is the justest of all ends. And I almost told him I was the King of Fate! What a reminiscent air this plateau has! And that dulcet Jacko spoke