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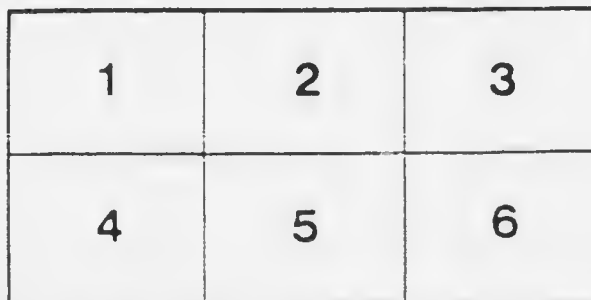
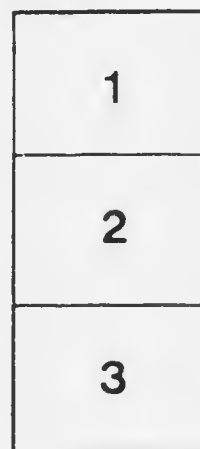
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Blue Anchor Inn



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Blue Anchor Inn

A nice-looking young lady for business reasons needed a husband, in a hurry. A man lent her his name for five hundred dollars—and the promise of a speedy divorce. Then — for reasons quite apart from business — she changed her mind. And so Brooke finds himself married to a lady whose face he has never seen. What would you do if you were Brooke? It didn't look amusing to Brooke, but the situation as Mr. Morris sees it just ripples and sparkles with fun like the sea on a sunny morning.

Blue Anchor Inn



Edwin Bateman Morris

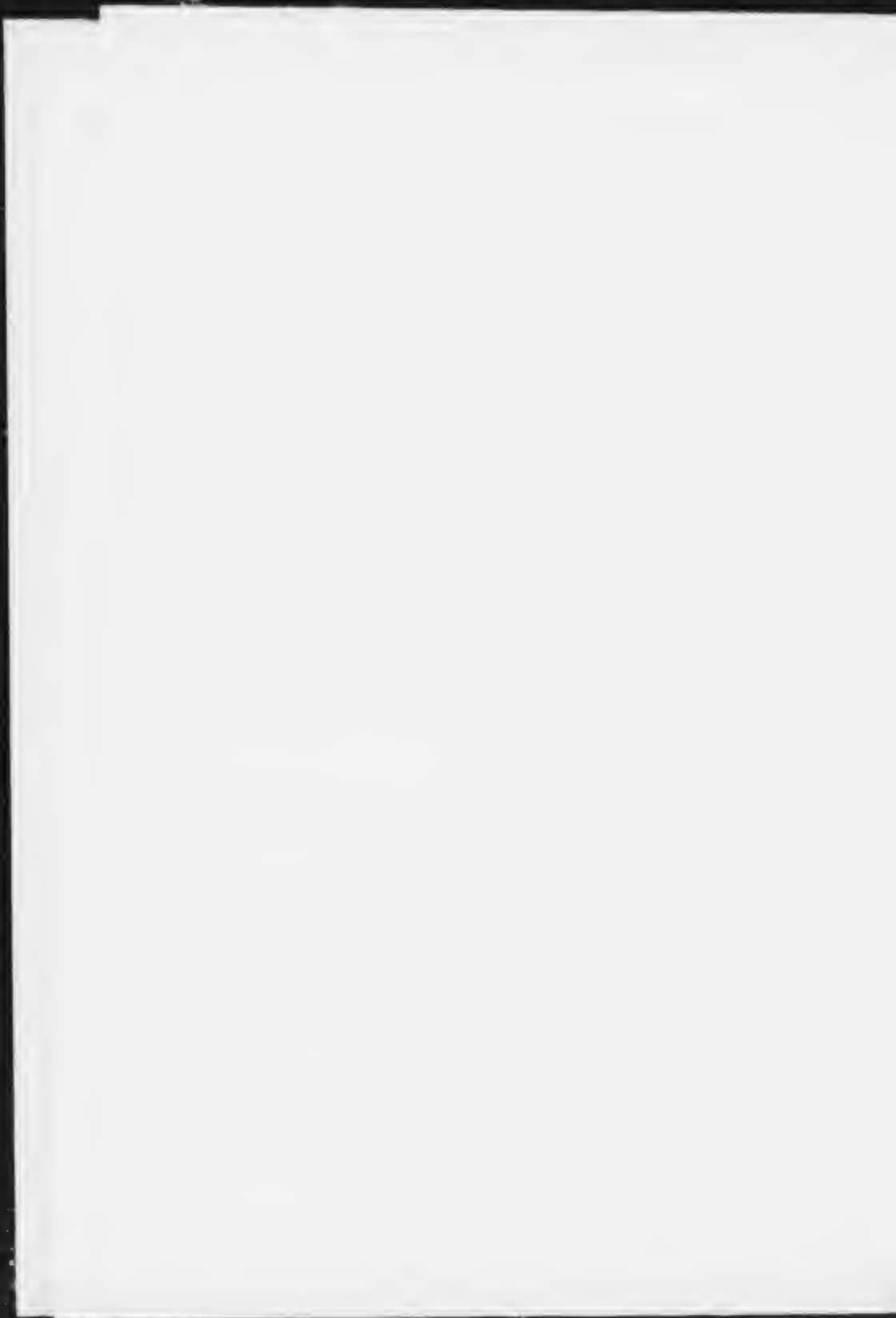
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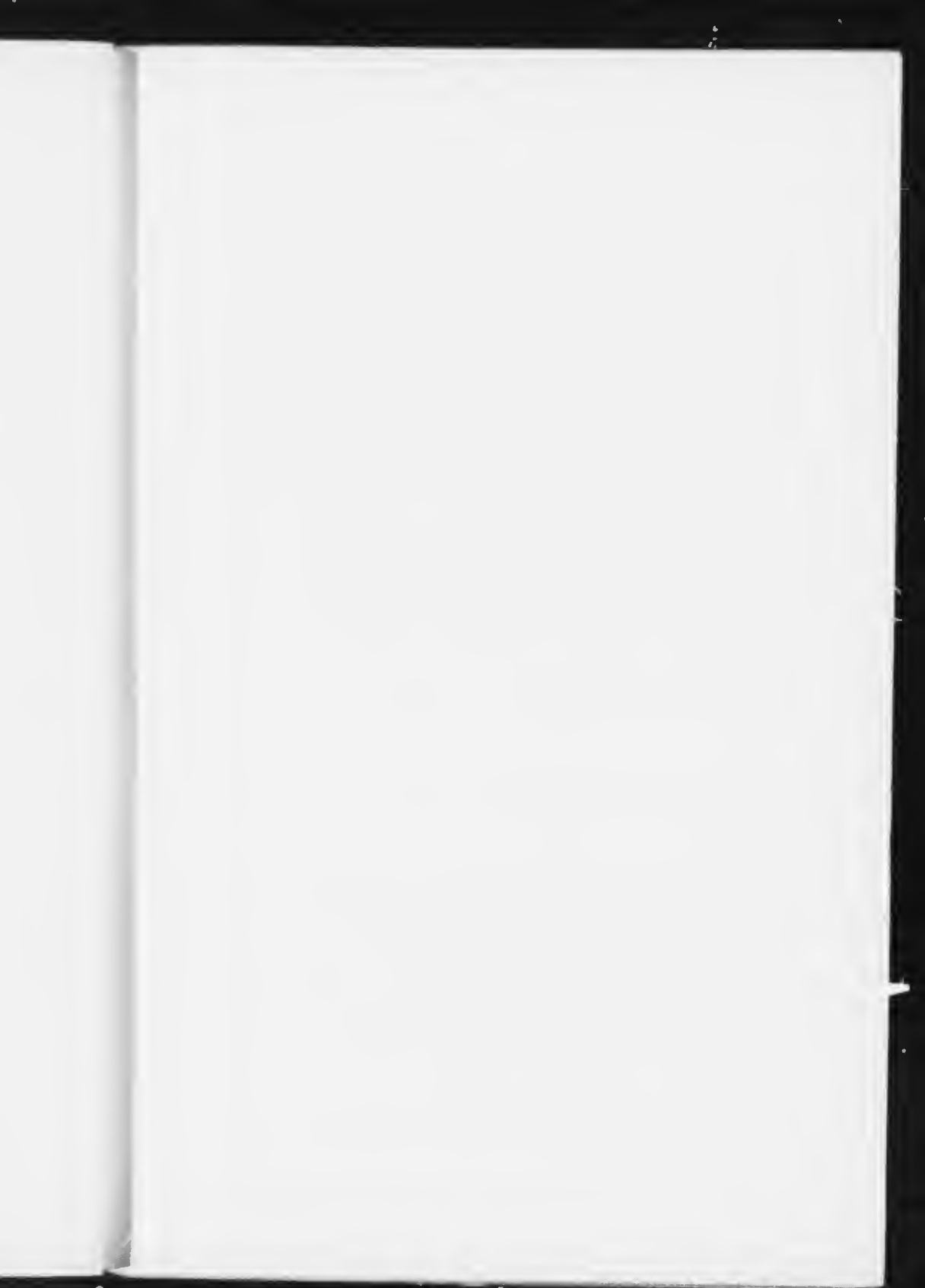
IN



THE

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"IS IT DEEP ENOUGH HERE TO DIVE?"

BLUE ANCHOR INN

BY

EDWIN BATEMAN MORRIS



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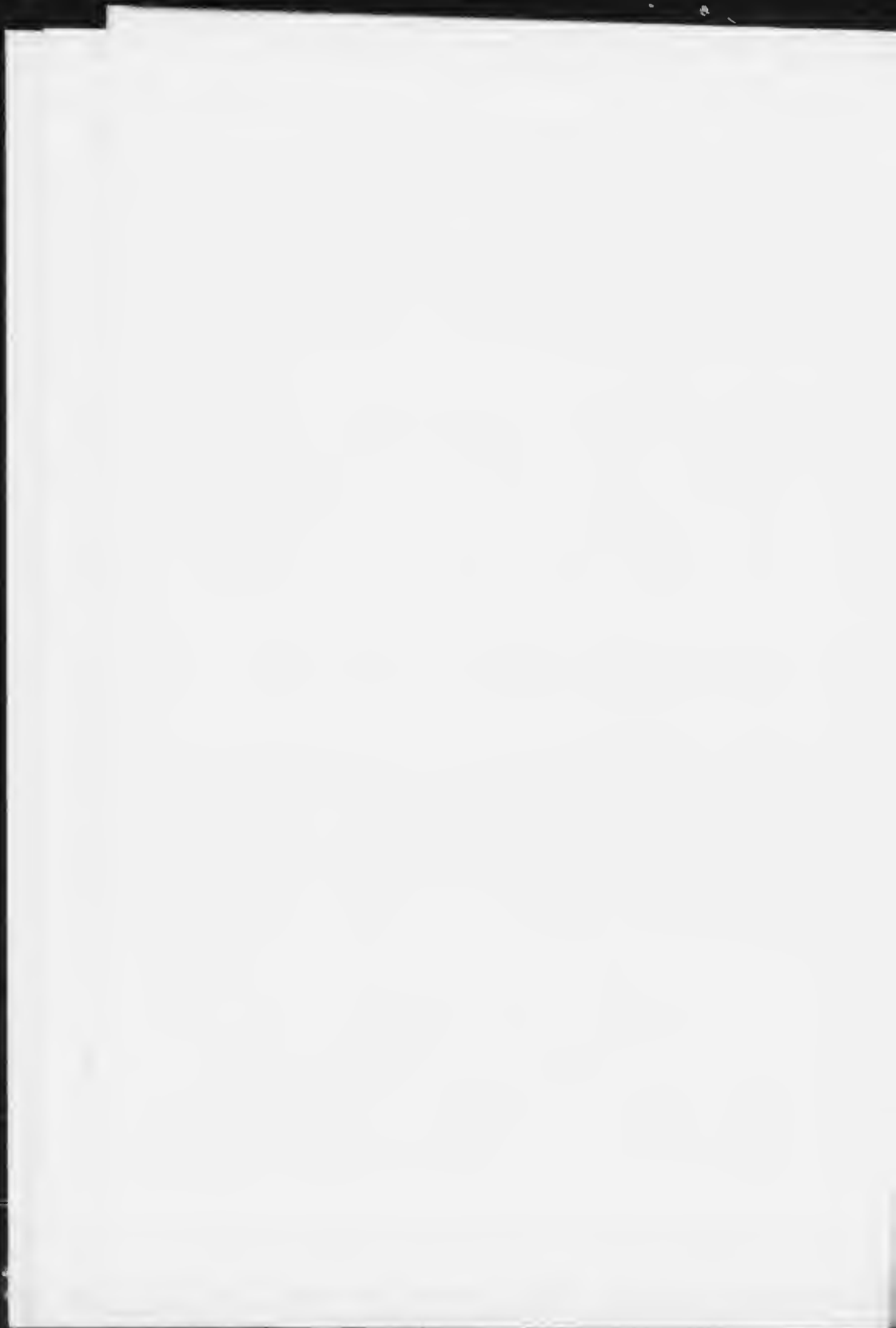
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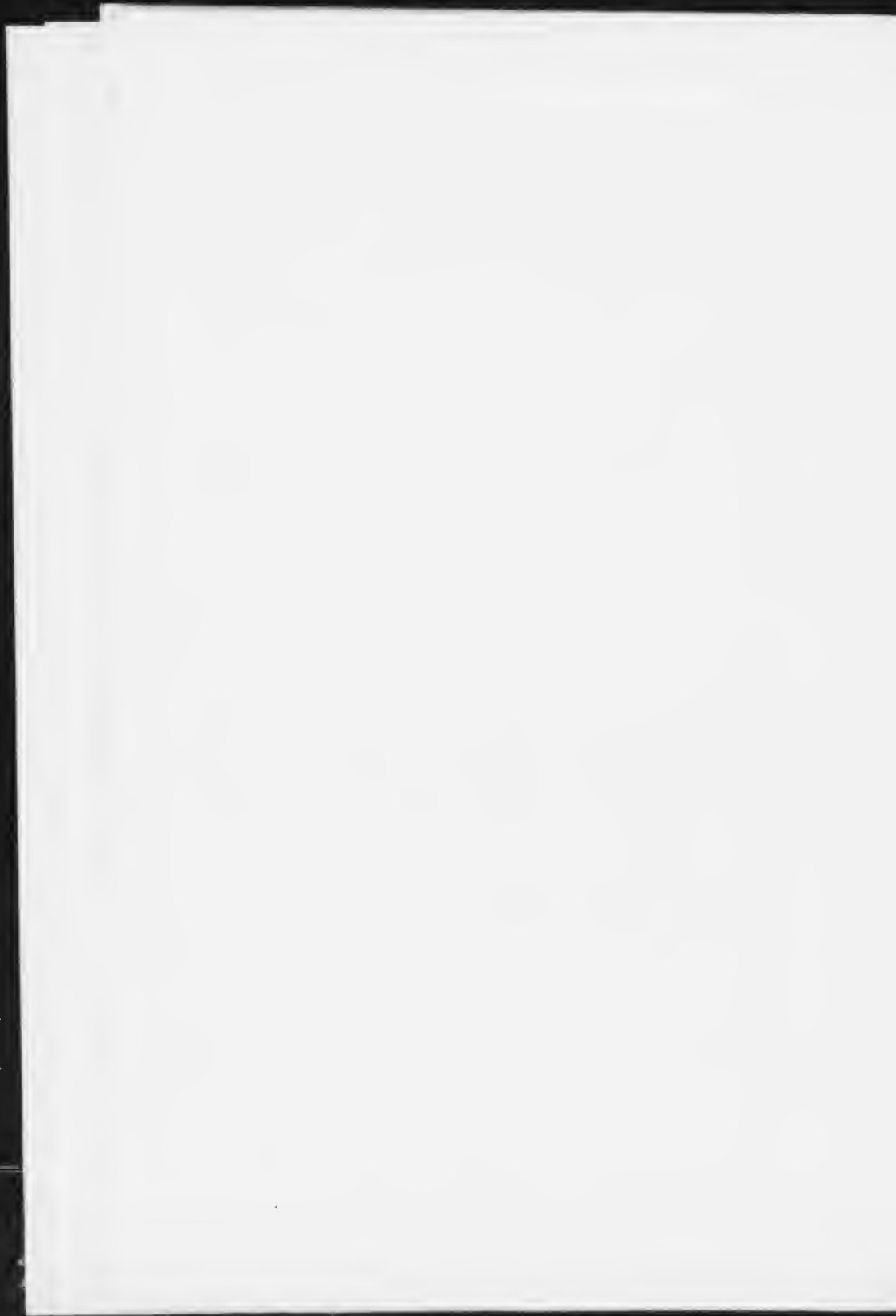
To My Mother



Illustrations

	PAGE
" IS IT DEEP ENOUGH HERE TO DIVE? " <i>Frontispiece</i>	
SHE STOOD IN THE DOORWAY	55
" IT SOUNDS INTERESTING "	73
" YOU MUST TAKE A VERY TINY BITE "	159
" I'M BUSY TO-DAY "	246

Blue Anchor Inn.



Blue Anchor Inn

CHAPTER I

A RICH young man sauntered unassumingly down the street. He was carefully and neatly attired, and appeared jovial and contented in the station of life to which it had pleased Providence to call him. At the street corner he paused, and counted his entire fortune.

There were three crumpled bills, some loose silver and a nickel—no more. It was the fag-end of poverty, judged by the world's standard. His riches consisted only of buoyancy and lightness of heart.

For many a day he had watched his small store of money steadily disappearing. He had economized here, pinched there, done without on all sides, fighting every inch of the way as the balance ebbed, living in the tiny hall-room he would have been ashamed to have his friends

BLUE ANCHOR INN

see, eating meals at quick-lunch counters, walking instead of riding, enduring his winter suit through the warm spring days, and suffering, in a word, all the tortures of poverty, disappointment and humiliation. And now at last when the end had come and there stood between him and the world only somewhat less than four dollars, his jaded capacity for discouragement responded no longer. He was an optimist and a fatalist, and believed that when Dame Fortune gave a cuff with one hand she would soon be reaching out the other to help one up again. So when he saw Adversity waiting for him on the far side of his three dollars and eighty cents, he faced her calmly and was not terrified.

"I wonder," he said, holding the burden of his wealth in his hand, "what I shall do with all this money."

There was no immediate answer from the surrounding atmosphere. A newsboy came whistling down the street; he stopped his tune and his progress to observe with unembarrassed interest the young man standing by the street curb.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Want a paper, mister?" he suggested at length.

The young man nodded. With one deft motion the boy proffered the paper and received the money.

"Son," said the purchaser, suddenly, after he had given the head-lines a rather cursory glance, "suppose you had four dollars, and no more, just like that"—he showed the money in his hand—"and you had no chance of getting any more, what would you do?"

The boy answered promptly.

"I'd blow it in," he said.

The man on the curb threw back his head and laughed.

"Why," he demanded, interested in this idea, "wouldn't it be better to make it last just as long as possible?"

His companion spat into the gutter with an air of great latent wisdom.

"No," he observed contemptuously, "a guy never gets no fun out of bein' a tight-wad. Them dubs that keeps a strangle-holt on their coin, when they spends a nickel they feel like

BLUE ANCHOR INN

they lost an old friend. None o' that in mine. I'd take them four bones and drop 'em all at once so they'd make a noise big enough to hear a block away."

The man looked at him and nodded speculatively.

"Then what?" he said. "That's not the end of everything."

"After that you're busted, ain't you?"

"Un-doubtedly."

"When you're busted you can't get any worse. You got to get better. Ain't that so?"

But while the man was digesting this philosophy the newsmerchant darted away after a gentleman in a silk hat and was lost behind the corner of the street. The young man slipped the money back in his pocket and jingled the coins thoughtfully.

"Well," he muttered at length, "that's the way I feel, too. I haven't the nerve to be a tight-wad, so I'll be a spender. The whole thing is over now. I'll be a gentleman to-night. Tomorrow, perhaps, I can get a job in a department store."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

A street-car came along and he got aboard. He was hungry for just one more meal in the haunts of civilization. The car stopped at a wide street and he presently found himself before a well-lighted hostelry. A man turned the revolving door for him as he entered. There were great scagliola columns in the lobby, and the whole place fairly glistened with the pomp and vanity resulting from women in expensive clothes, idle men lolling in leather chairs, scurrying bell-boys, hurrying porters and all the intricate wheels of the great deferential machine called a hotel.

He gave his hat to the boy at the door of the café, placing a coin in an obscure pocket to make sure of being able to tip him when he came out. His air of being on the point of spending all the money there was made such an impression that he was shown to a table by a window. He was pleased. It is a very serious matter to spend every bit of your money at one time, and he wanted to get all the comfort and excitement he could out of it. Brooke stretched his legs luxuriously under the table.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

There was an air of general sociability in the wide low-ceilinged room. Men were scanning the menu cards with pleasant anticipation, or dining vigorously, or lingering over their tables in a haze of smoke. Everywhere was the stimulating hum of conversation and laughter. Brooke's heart warmed within him. He ran his eye up and down the *carte du jour*. He ordered a grapefruit with a tiny glass of kummel to pour upon it, for his opening course. Then there was to be a *filet mignon* (with many directions as to the precise course to be followed in its preparation) and with it brussels sprouts and asparagus.

The tall, grave waiter, who from his appearance might have been a reincarnation of Franz Liszt, suggested as homely a thing as baked potato, which he would doctor with paprika and other things until it was a very wonderful dish. It was a specialty at this particular place. Then there was an elaborate salad with a name like an historical novel, composed of a sort of glorified mayonnaise and fruits and nuts and bits of ambrosia, perhaps. The dessert was a simple

BLUE ANCHOR INN

thing called a café parfait. In the end came a little glass the size of a thimble, in it, half-way to the top, creme de cocoa with white cream floated upon it.

It was a tremendous occasion for a man who had been an exile from the comforts of civilization for a long while. Even the strains of the musical comedy frippery the orchestra played lifted him out of himself into a more rarefied atmosphere. It was not until the room began to thin out somewhat and he was smoking his cigarette that he descended to earth. He noted that it was his last cigarette. Following out the line of thought suggested by this, he permitted himself to wonder what steps the world would take to provide for him at breakfast time on the morrow.

The trouble with Brooke was that he had invented something. The second trouble was that something was a useful article—in a word, a new species of concrete pile. If he had invented some small and frivolous thing, such as a can opener or a glove fastener, or a tie clasp, he would have found a ready sale for it. But a concrete pile

BLUE ANCHOR INN

was too big a thing to succeed quickly. It depended for its success upon the support of building contractors and structural engineers, a race of incredulous and cautious people who took few chances.

One man had indeed agreed to form a company for the exploitation of the pile if he would sink three or four full size specimens so their qualifications could be tested. This would take money, which he had not. But though he had been through all the possible forms of discouragement, he did not despair. There was always hope in his heart.

There is a verse which says, "Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." Brooke's quality of mind was modeled on that. He was content to shift the responsibility of prolonging his existence to some agency more expert than himself, but at the same time he could not help wondering how it would be done. It did not occur to him to doubt that it would be done.

A hand was laid on his shoulder.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Mr. Brooke," said a pleasant voice, "you linger long after your dinner."

Looking up, the young man recognized a gentleman named Sprague, a lawyer with whom he once had some dealings.

Pleased at the appearance of even so casual an acquaintance, Brooke rose and greeted him cordially.

"I have an appointment," he said, smiling, "with my guardian angel."

The lawyer stared, then smiled.

"If you intend to wait, you had better have the management set up a cot for you," he suggested.

Brooke laughed. The other lighted his cigar and blew out the match.

"What do you mean by your remark?" he asked.

"Well, I am in the hands of Providence. My money is all gone. I had three dollars and eighty cents at six-thirty this evening, which I have just made over to the hotel in return for a very good dinner. Now I expect my guardian angel to take me by the hand and lead me out of the dark to the bright trail."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

The other knitted his brows and appeared to view Brooke from a new angle.

"Are you really down and out?" he asked, pleasantly.

"Yes."

A spark of excitement shone in Sprague's eyes. He drew up a chair.

"Providence," he said, eyeing his companion keenly, "often sends its benefits in strange packages."

"All right; I'm not exactly in a position to choose."

The lawyer rose.

"That being the case," he said, "will you come to my office? I have a suggestion to make to you."

CHAPTER II

BROOKE followed his companion in bewilderment. They went up the street to the building in which Sprague had his office and took the elevator to the tenth floor. The young man knew the office well, as he had had transactions there more than a year before when getting his patent. They went into the inner room.

Mr. Sprague looked at his watch and closed the lid with a snap.

"This is a strange proposition I am about to put before you," he began briskly. "I have had nothing at all like it before in my legal practice."

"Go on," said his companion. "I am all impatience."

"On the fifteenth of last November," said the lawyer, "a man by the name of Beckendorf died in East Saint Louis. He was a thrifty old party who managed to die possessed of nearly a hundred thousand dollars. He had, however, only one relative, a young girl of about twenty odd

BLUE ANCHOR INN

living here in Philadelphia. To her he left the entire sum. But either because he had some notions on the subject of the propagation of the race, or because he wanted to make people bear him in mind for a little while after he was dead, he inserted the condition in his will that she was to be married within six months after his death or forfeit the money."

"He wanted to make her earn it," suggested Brooke.

"Miss Dean—the girl in question—seems to feel that way about it. She has put it off and put it off. Instead of selecting a young man in a businesslike way, marrying him and having it all over with, she folded her hands in her lap and waited for the man to come along. Now that's no way for a girl to get a husband. She ought to be right on the jump ready to pull him in the instant he gets his head out of the water. Nowadays there is so much competition in every line of business that no one can afford to be asleep at the switch."

Brooke gazed at his companion in a bewildered sort of way.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Well, to make a long story short," went on Sprague, "Miss Dean suddenly came up against the horrible discovery last week that she had only seven days more in which to get the man. Terrible thought! She did not want to lose the money any more than you or I would. I saw then it was time to take the matter in my own hands. As a last resort I told her I would get the man."

The young man smiled.

"Now," continued the lawyer, "getting a husband for a lady in one week's time is a much more difficult undertaking than I suspected. In fact, until I came across you, by the merest chance, in the hotel to-night, I thought I was beaten."

"Me!" cried the other.

He gazed at the lawyer in open-eyed astonishment.

"Yes. Why not? There is five hundred dollars in it for you."

Brooke surveyed his shoes dubiously. This was a staggering proposition.

"Got another girl in view?" Sprague demanded.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"No."

"Married already?"

"No."

Mr. Sprague glanced at his watch again.

"This will have none of the inconveniences of the usual marriage. The lady leaves for Nevada on the midnight train to-night. She agrees to get a divorce within one year. That relieves you of all trouble. If she wears a veil you won't even know what she looks like, and won't be obliged to as much as stop to her on the street. It is an ideal marriage."

The young man looked at his companion dubiously.

"Suppose you don't accept this offer," the lawyer went on; "what will you do to-morrow morning when you wake up without even the proverbial thirty cents in your pocket?"

Brooke set his teeth.

"That remark went right straight over the plate," he said at length. "I will marry your girl."

"Good!" said Sprague, and reached for the telephone.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

The rest happened very quickly. Sprague had bribed the license clerk and a magistrate to be where he could get in touch with them at any moment up to midnight. Being summoned by telephone, they made haste and arrived at the office before the lawyer had finished breaking the glad news of the wedding to the bride-elect.

After about half an hour of tedious waiting the bridal party arrived. There were but two people in it. A slender woman in a black dress wearing a thick veil, who Brooke judged was the bride's mother, appeared first. The girl with her was rather more Irish than German, with large hands and a bloom on her cheek like a red apple.

"Miss Dean, may I present Mr. Brooke," said Sprague.

He bowed, and wondered why they did not introduce her mother too.

"Will you take the lady by the hand?" said the magistrate.

Brooke was uncertain which hand to use, but decided on his right. He held that out with a show of assurance.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"The other one," whispered Sprague, hoarsely. He disagreed with Sprague, but he held out his left hand obediently.

The lawyer grasped him by the shoulder and turned him round.

"The other *girl*," he cried. "That's her maid you are trying to marry."

"My mistake," said Brooke, bowing graciously.

He took the hand the girl in black held out to him, and the ceremony proceeded. He could see nothing of the face beneath her veil. Only the lobe of one ear was visible. He saw that she was wearing jade earrings. He knew they were jade because he saw some like them the next day in a jewelry shop, and inquired what they were. When it was all over he leaned down and said:

"Would you mind lifting your veil?"

She started to do so.

"Yes, I should," she decided, suddenly changing her mind.

"Very good. In small matters," he explained, "I intend to let my wife have her own way."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"You have just about time for your train," observed Mr. Sprague.

"Good-bye," said the girl in black.

She started to go.

Brooke tugged at a large seal ring on his finger.

"It seems rather niggardly not to give your wife a ring," he told her. "Will you take this?"

She held out her finger, and he slipped on the gold band.

"Thank you. Good-bye."

When they had gone he sank into the nearest chair.

"Short ceremony, ain't it?" said the license clerk by way of conversation.

"But deadly," supplemented the bridegroom.

CHAPTER III

IT was the thirtieth day of May one whole year later. The round red sun was just rising out of the ocean. It was a gorgeous spectacle. The sea was a great sea of claret. The sky was all shot through with deep crimson and purple, and up in the zenith the wandering clouds were pink and light as jewelers' cotton.

It was some time before the city of Lugger Island began to bestir itself, and when it did it was with an easy air of indolence. The mayor, the president of city councils, the chief of police and the official surveyor wandered down to the beach and put his fishing tackle in the long boat. He was presently followed by the entire permanent male population of the metropolis (four in number) who began to make ready to launch the boat through the waves. Behind them the city rested like a phantom town. A hundred houses were there in all stages of dissolution. Shutters hung by one hinge, window

BLUE ANCHOR INN

panes were gone, shingles had disappeared, and here and there a house had settled ridiculously on its foundations, and over all rested the quiet as of the virgin forest.

The city of Lugger Island was not a metropolis in the same sense that New York is. The permanent population consisted at that time of the five qualified voters above mentioned, and seven women. But there had been palmy days,—days when the permanent population numbered five hundred, the floating population more than a thousand, and the population that simply sat on the beach in their bathing-suits and did not float at all another thousand. Then the city was a real city. The mayor was elected by a machine; the town was run by a boss. So great was the interest in elections that out of the five hundred flesh and blood people on the island more than a thousand had their names registered as qualified electors, and quite a half of these received money for their votes. In fact, no modern municipal improvement was lacking. Two trolley cars toured the island; the three hotels were all that summer hotels should be; a rail-

BLUE ANCHOR INN

road that ran across the sketchy trestle from the mainland to the island delivered its trains an hour or so late with almost superhuman New Jersey regularity.

Those days indeed were the happy, happy days. But one November a great squall came up out of the northeast. The mayor and the city council saw it, and looked very serious. The railroad trestle saw it first of all, and kissed both shores good-bye. When the first high wave came along it laid its withered form on that billowy crest and never stopped its flight until it went ashore at Cape May, miles and miles to the south.

That was the beginning of the decline of Lugger Island. The railroad company never rebuilt their track. The hotels never reopened. Property values were so reduced that it was cheaper to move away than to stay. Nobody knew where the five hundred disappeared to. But they did disappear, quickly and silently, and the town was now a mere faded memory of what it once had been.

Lugger Island was now a poor, tame and un-

BLUE ANCHOR INN

exciting place to serve as a human habitation. It would have been still tamer and more unexciting if it had not been for Mr. and Mrs. Edward Gilpin. They were the two people who upheld the island's self-respect, for they were "summer people," and came there to live for four months every year because they liked it. They had repaired the old Blue Anchor Inn, a long, rambling structure, and made a house of it. Before this hostelry still swung the old sign. It stated emphatically, in large blue letters, that the structure was the "Blue Anchor Inn," and the Gilpins, in common with the other inhabitants of the island, continued to use the name. It seemed a desecration to remove the sign, and it was a physical impossibility to contradict it. Even the two painted emblems, which preceded and followed the painted name, while they looked more like blue egg-beaters or blue cuff-links or almost any other unmaritime object, were admitted, by reason of the personal force of the name, to be real anchors. So the Gilpins called it the Blue Anchor Inn, as of yore. As the occupants of the ancient structure, they furnished the excitement

BLUE ANCHOR INN

and bolstered up the local pride of that faded resort. For they had guests who furnished theme for gossip and conversation to the whole tiny community. Even now, as the five fishermen pulled their boat out to sea, they were discussing with unflagging interest the two visitors who had arrived the night before—a tall, dark-haired young man, and a blond, serious-looking person with black-rimmed eye-glasses. But if these fishermen were thrilled by the new arrivals, their excitement was as nothing compared with the animation that possessed the little breakfast table at the Blue Anchor Inn.

Mrs. Gilpin, looking very trim and pretty, sat at the head of the table, her husband, a rotund jolly man of about thirty years, facing her. On her right was the blond gentleman with the tortoise-shell eye-glasses. He was a very serious-looking individual, and rather over-fastidious, as was shown by the wide black band that hung from the glasses. On her left was the tall, dark-haired young man. At any other time Mrs. Gilpin would have held the attention of the three men absolutely to herself, but two of them were

BLUE ANCHOR INN

intently listening to the tall, dark one, and she was listening with, if possible, even more intentness than the others.

They had not seen the young man in several years. In the last year he had had a strange experience. Presently Mrs. Gilpin's interest in the story he was telling grew entirely too rarefied for silence.

"But you couldn't possibly *think*," she cried in astonishment, "of marrying her under those conditions."

The young man studied his spoon reflectively for a moment.

"Well, I thought twice," he said slowly, "and then I did it."

His hostess poured the cream in the sugar instead of on her berries.

"Well, I never!" she ejaculated.

"It would be simpler," chuckled Gilpin, "to pour it on the floor."

"But, Roger Brooke," she cried, ignoring interruptions, "I am sure I never *heard* of such a thing!"

"There, Roger," declared the head of the house,

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"that doesn't leave you a leg to stand on. If Mrs. Edward Gilpin has never heard of it ——"

"Ned, do be quiet. You're such a bore."

The serious young man (whose name was Halsey) took the floor, in a gentleman-of-the-jury manner, which never, even in his moments of relaxation, left him.

"You say you married her a year ago the fifteenth of this month?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And in all that time you haven't even seen her?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Not to your knowledge!" cried Mrs. Gilpin.

"Well, you see, I have no idea in the world what she looks like, except that she wears jade earrings."

"Is she a Caucasian?" ventured Gilpin.

"Don't joke with him, Ned," exclaimed his wife severely. "Roger Brooke, you ought to be spanked and sent to bed without your supper every night for a year."

"I know it," murmured Brooke.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Suppose something should turn up, and they wouldn't grant her a divorce, look what a position you would be in."

"The chance of that is not so very remote, either," put in Halsey. "If they found there was collusion ——"

"What is collusion? Is that what I have on my thumb?"

She held up a pretty white hand for inspection and commiseration.

"Contusion, my dear, contusion," explained her husband, from his superior pinnacle of knowledge.

"If they found there was collusion," went on Halsey, "that is, that you had arranged it all beforehand, the machinery of the law would not grant a divorce."

"That would be simply horrible!" cried the lady.

Brooke nodded.

"The lawyer spoke about that collusion idea," he said, in a moment. "He seemed to be nervous about it. He said I was not to communicate with him for a year in any way what-

BLUE ANCHOR INN

ever. That would allay suspicion as to the thing having been fixed."

"And you didn't know anything about it for a whole year?"

"Not until two weeks ago, when I went to see Sprague."

"Well," demanded Gilpin, "what did Sprague say?"

Brooke smiled, a little wanly.

"They wouldn't grant the divorce!" cried the young hostess excitedly.

"Worse than that."

"Worse than that?"

"The lady has come on East again. She never even applied for a divorce."

Gilpin laid down his fork and looked at him in astonishment.

"What do you make of that?" he demanded, at length.

"I suppose," said the other shortly, "she didn't want one."

CHAPTER IV

GILPIN'S round face grew very long. "That is a complication," he exclaimed seriously.

Mrs. Gilpin gazed at Brooke with ready sympathy.

"Never mind, it will come out all right," she said, with no especial originality.

"But what is her game? I feel like Damocles with the sword hanging overhead. Any minute it may drop. I'm liable to her for support, protection, love, honor, obedience, milliners' bills, everything. Every strange woman that looks at me on the street makes the cold chills run up my back. Some day one of them will nip me firmly by the ear and say, 'Come on!' and that will be the end of me."

Gilpin helped himself generously from the platter before him. He turned to Brooke with a cheerful smile.

"Oh, rot!" he exclaimed. "You don't sup-

BLUE ANCHOR INN

pose the lady has arrived at that state of mental depravity where she actually *wants* you for a husband, do you?"

"Then why didn't she get a divorce when she had a chance? I've lost pounds worrying over the question. I've got so I don't go out on the street any more than I have to in the daytime, and then I stick strictly to the back ways and alleys."

"Not really," cried Mrs. Gilpin.

"It's a humiliating state of affairs. But put yourself in my place. Here you are one minute a care-free bachelor, respected by friends and relatives alike, regarding life, in fact, as a pastime, when suddenly some one touches you on the shoulder, and—in a moment you are a married man!"

"It's gone to his head, Neddy," sighed Mrs. Gilpin sadly. "We shall have to keep him here during June, while you are taking your vacation, and let him have complete rest."

Gilpin looked up.

"What people in your condition need is total relaxation," he observed, emphasizing the fact

BLUE ANCHOR INN

with his pudgy forefinger. "They should be removed from all possibility of contact with their own particular *bete noir*."

"Exactly," cried his wife.

"My better half agrees with me. This should be an omen of good luck. Don't you be discouraged, Roger, old boy; you'll pull through all right."

"You all talk as if I had softening of the brain," said Brooke, half amused and half resentful.

"Ned," said the fair hostess, taking charge of the situation, "suppose you telegraph to some one in his house to send down a trunkful of things for him."

"Oh, I couldn't think ——" began the young man.

Gilpin put his hand on his shoulder.

"What you need is rest, and absolute quiet, Roger. The possibility of a fellow's wife catching up to him after he thought he was safely rid of her is enough to unnerve any man."

Mrs. Gilpin sniffed. Her husband's eyes twinkled.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"That is, in most cases," he went on seriously. "Now, Roger, you have only one job in town, and you said that was held up until they settled a flaw in the title. So what's to prevent your staying?"

Brooke could remember only dimly his last vacation, and this being an especially propitious time, nothing seemed to develop to prevent his accepting his hostess' invitation without amendment. So before he had time to realize the situation entirely he found himself composing a letter to his roommate asking him to fill a trunk with assorted wardrobe and ship it to him. His roommate was a dependable fellow. It was therefore within the bounds of possibility that ere long this paraphernalia would arrive.

The mere composing of the letter put him in excellent spirits, and by the time he had finished another to the Schuylkill Concrete Pile Company, of which he was the junior partner, saying that on account of his run-down condition he would take advantage of the lull in business and begin his vacation immediately, he was jubilant. He strongly suspected that he would be consider-

BLUE ANCHOR INN

ably more run down at the office on the morrow than his condition had ever been, but that did not worry him.

In a moment a load had been lifted from his mind. What could be more joyous and soothing than this island with all its peace and quiet, with none of the complications existing in the city he had left behind, with no strange women present, and with no place for strange women to come from? It was an exhilarating spot. He was glad Gilpin lived there and owned the whole island.

For at the time of the washing away of the railroad trestle, and the subsequent decline in real estate values on Lugger Island, Ned Gilpin's uncle had held mortgages on most of the property there, and when land had depreciated to such an extent that it was worth almost as much per square foot as the water surrounding it, he found it necessary, when the notes came due and were not paid, to foreclose. By so doing he came into possession of a large tract of real estate chiefly remarkable for its extent. He died a poor man, and Ned Gilpin inherited the whole

BLUE ANCHOR INN

island from him. It was rather in the nature of a white elephant on his hands, but he and his wife discovered soon that, as they had little money for vacation frivolities, it made an excellent summer place. Except for about a month or six weeks of the year when he stayed on the island all the time, Gilpin went to and from the city every day, accomplishing the first lap of the journey by means of a thirty-five foot motor boat, which was their only means of communication with the mainland.

It was a glorious place to loaf and breathe the fresh air, as Brooke discovered very soon. At eleven o'clock they all donned their bathing-suits and sauntered down the main street of the town, a broad avenue extending from the Blue Anchor Inn to the sea. There was a wooden sidewalk on one side of the street which had come to a state of senile irritability that caused the boards every once in a while to spring up suddenly upon the unsuspecting pedestrian. The houses lining Main Street were inhabited only by the memory of former days. The porches that once, on the approach of meal time, had filled with hungry

BLUE ANCHOR INN

guests were empty now save for the piles of sand drifted ankle-deep upon them, or for the swinging corpse of a hammock in which many an ardent swain, before the invention of the arc light, had pressed his lady love to his breast. The cross streets were neatly designated by printed boards, and sometimes one could distinguish on the houses numbers which guided the former postman in his delivery of long-forgotten love-letters.

It will be seen that there was no longer any sizzling gayety at Lugger Island. No band played rag-time all the afternoon. No artists modeled figures in the sand. No one sold salt-water taffy, or Mexican drawn work, or Japanese bric-à-brac. But the beach was one wide stretch of sand, smooth and hard, and almost untouched by human feet; the waves rolled in and broke, and the whine of no merry-go-round made discord with them. The sky was a clear and solid blue. The gulls flew low and wet their wings in the sea. Less than a quarter of a mile off, standing in somewhat toward the shore, sauntered a trim yawl, her three sunlit sails cutting

BLUE ANCHOR INN

the horizon sharply. In the foreground riding the waves was the incoming fisher boat, the spray splashing from her bows as the four men bent to their oars.

The odor of the brine filled Brooke's nostrils. His youth and animal spirits surged within him. He felt the pleasant physical power that comes from the bright sun, the clear air, an unclouded mind, and a sense of no responsibility. He raced down the beach, and, plunging in, swam far, far out until it seemed almost that the spires of London Town were just out of sight in the distance.

He also might have had a better view of the yawl with the white sails had he been interested. But he was not, and swam on with an easy overhand stroke, oblivious of everything save the fact that here, far from the haunts of men, his mind rested in peace.

CHAPTER V

THE life-boat with its cargo of fish being safely landed, his honor the mayor took a turn up the beach. There was a lack of executive ostentation about him, a certain Jeffersonian simplicity that bespoke familiarity with the life of his constituents. His hands were not afraid of the soil he governed. His clothes were not too good to take the spray of the sea which washed his domain. In fact, the executive costume, once of a full black, had corroded to a moss green under the efforts of the broad Atlantic. No ornaments or insignia of office decorated his person save two bright collar-buttons, fore and aft, which shone in the sun like the brazen belaying-pins of a revenue cutter. His face was the face of a benevolent despot. He had great white, bushy eyebrows, which almost concealed his kindly bright eyes, a tousled head of white hair, a long, roistering, piratical beak of a nose, a bushy festoon of beard

BLUE ANCHOR INN

under his chin, and an expanse of upper lip on which the growth had been impeded to such an extent by the use of some edged tool that it might be said in a manner of speaking to be smooth-shaven.

As he strolled along the sands in the general direction in which his midday meal lay, he kept an anxious eye on the yawl running along close inshore. He had never seen a boat sail so close in before, and was interested to know what would happen to her. Presently he came to the street, close by the spot where the Gilpins and their guests lay basking in the sun, by which he must leave the sandy shore and plunge into the heart of the metropolis in search of his dinner. He paused and saluted the party.

"What's he running so close in for, cap'n?" demanded Gilpin, who was watching the sail through a pair of glasses.

The mayor passed his hand through his hair.

"'Tain't on account of lack of room," he ventured. "Th' ocean's about three thousand miles wide at this particular point."

Gilpin pointed his glasses again.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"They aren't even heaving a lead. What kind of a sailor is he, anyway?"

"I jedge that in early life he was trained as a bookkeeper," returned the mayor. "Yes, sir; he's sailed over about eleven localities where there's scarcely enough water to wet your feet, and only the angels in heaven could 'a' kept that boat from stiekin'."

"I don't see why she hasn't."

"I don't know; but I know this," said the cap'n with finality; "if she doesn't bump soon, *I'm* going to my dinner."

As if in immediate answer to this ultimatum, the yawl came to an abrupt stop. The man at the wheel took a header over it. People appeared out of the cabin. There was no doubt about it, the yawl was fast aground. The big mainsail, and the little jigger sail abaft the wheel, filled and tugged manfully, driving her further on the bar. Presently the man, who had done the somersault over the wheel, loosened the halyards on the jigger, and it came down with a run. The foresail came down next, and finally, after some confusion and delay, the mainsail drooped, the

BLUE ANCHOR INN

big canvas shook and rippled, and lowered itself slowly out of the landscape with a rattle of rings that could be heard on shore. The yawl stood still like a hitched horse, the masts swinging back and forth with the waves and the incoming waves splashing against her quarter.

"How soon will she float off?" asked Gilpin, turning to the mayor.

"High tide now. Too late to get her off till to-morrow," said the mayor.

Gilpin rose.

"That being the case, Captain John, either you and the others will have to go out in your boat after them, or I'll have to bring round my launch."

Captain John surveyed the sailboat through Gilpin's glasses.

"There's wimmin aboard that yawl," he announced accusingly.

Gilpin nodded.

"I'm not going t' land any more females through the surf," added the captain with finality.

Extracting a well-built chronometer from his

BLUE ANCHOR INN

hip pocket, thereupon he took a reading of the time, and nodding pleasantly to them, strode off up the street, eliminating himself from the situation.

Gilpin looked out at the stranded yawl cheerfully.

"We really must move to some quiet place," he remarked. "There is too much excitement at Lugger Island."

Whereupon they gathered up their sunshades and other paraphernalia and followed Captain John into the city limits. Arriving at the house they released Willy, the butler, mechanic, horticulturist and man of all work in the Gilpin household, from his job of shelling peas, and putting him in the launch, instructed him to make a daring rescue at sea. Willy, who had grown so blasé that the shelling of peas was no longer a pastime, joyfully started the engine and went put-put-putting down the strip of water between the island and the mainland. The others departed to lunch.

A rescue from a boat stuck in the mud is about as romantic as extracting a fat lady

BLUE ANCHOR INN

from a broken-down hansom cab. Gilpin was very much annoyed at the whole proceeding. It would be impossible to pull the yawl off before noon on the following day, and meanwhile they would have to take care of the party on board, whatever their character, personal attractions, or numerical strength. This was somewhat disturbing.

Presently, from the window of the dining-room, they could see the launch maneuvering about in an endeavor to come alongside the stranded vessel. This accomplished presently without apparent mishap, the passengers disembarked.

The launch backed safely away into deep water, stood still for a moment, and then with her exhaust shooting like a Gatling gun, made off down the coast. The masts of the yawl were already beginning to slump, as she listed with the falling tide.

In about half an hour the launch was heard coming back on the land side of the island, and down they went to the shore to greet their guests.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

They were rather relieved, however, to find that the party really regarded itself as consisting of but two people, an old man of about sixty, and a slim young woman who might have been anywhere from twenty-five to thirty. The old man was a strange individual. He wore a straw hat that must have been in the family for years. His head was so bald that all that remained of his former growth of hair was a little fringe connecting his ears in the back, which looked as if it might have been the lining of his hat hanging down. His suit of clothes, which was of good quality, was very much mussed and had creases and ripples running over it in every direction. There was no system about him. All his trappings and accouterments seemed to be shifting for themselves. His thin gray beard and his moth-eaten mustache, the gold-rimmed spectacles mended at the joint with white thread, all had a go-it-alone appearance as though they had never at any time had any one to take care of them.

"He looks as if he were made up to be funny," Brooke remarked, under his breath.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

The young woman was very trim and well dressed. Her small white pumps fitted admirably. There was a saucy hang to her spotless duck skirt. Her embroidered shirt-waist and the cascade of real lace at her throat were immaculate to a fault. She was very attractive to look at.

There were, besides these two, a young woman who appeared to act in the capacity of companion or courier for the lady, a sunburned, weathered person, who was doubtless the skipper, and the broad-shouldered coal-black cook, still wearing the apron he had on when the ship struck the bar.

The lady came forward with easy self-possession. As Mrs. Gilpin took her hand, she noticed that the newcomer wore jade earrings. She turned to introduce her husband and the others. Then it was she observed that Brooke had disappeared, but she did not have time to reason out why.

The old gentleman was waiting behind his companion with an absent expression in his benevolent eyes.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Let me present my uncle, Mr. Still," said the lady.

He shook every one firmly by the hand with willing cheerfulness. Halsey, who felt it was his duty to make conversation, seized upon the first idea that occurred to him and inquired :

'How did you like that sand-bar?'

The old gentleman stared at him. Then he smiled pleasantly.

"No, thanks," he said in a high, hollow voice, "I never indulge," and hurried forward after the others.

Halsey followed in a dazed sort of way.

"I'm sorry," Mrs. Gilpin was saying to the lady, "that you had to run aground, Miss—Still, is it?" she suggested hesitatingly.

The young woman laughed.

"No," she said. "My name is Brooke—Mrs. Brooke."

CHAPTER VI

MRS. GILPIN made it a point never to allow her emotions to get the better of her. She shut her lips firmly and nodded, with a show of indifference. Wild horses could not have dragged from her a confession that the name of Brooke meant any more to her than that of Jones or Smith, or any other monosyllabic appellation. The fact that the newcomer appeared to look at her searchingly, as if to discover what effect the disclosure of her name would have on her, sealed her lips the tighter. The Sphinx herself could not have been more reserved than was Mrs. Gilpin.

Arriving at the house the shipwrecked lady expressed a desire to change to more presentable attire, her clothes (though it was not noticeable to the average eye) having been splashed and soiled in the transit. The two women therefore repaired to regions above, accompanied by Miss Grey,

BLUE ANCHOR INN

who bore a suit-case which the coal-black person had brought up from the launch.

Gilpin and Halsey found themselves seated on the long front porch with the amiable Mr. Still. The two young men were both rather cautious about putting forth a conversational opening. Presently, however, the old gentleman looked up at the sign over the door, which said in faded letters, "Blue Anchor Inn." It aroused his interest.

"Do much business?" he asked genially, still in his toneless voice.

Gilpin suddenly got the idea the old man was deaf.

"This is not a real hotel," he shouted.

Mr. Still waved his hand deprecatingly.

"It does very well, it does very well," he said soothingly. "All of us can't keep Waldorf-Astorias."

"This is my private residence," cried Gilpin, his cherubic face very red.

"Best way to run it," nodded the other comprehendingly. "Just like a private house. What are your rates?"

BLUE ANCHOR INN

Gilpin stood up and shouted in the man's ear:

"This is not a business proposition."

"Maybe you had better raise your voice a little," suggested Halsey, adjusting his eye-glasses.

"He doesn't seem to hear you."

Gilpin glanced malevolently at him. Mr. Still recrossed his legs.

"Business proposition," he observed, turning his kindly eyes toward his exhausted host.

"Well, I'll make one. Twenty dollars a week," he declared triumphantly.

Gilpin lowered his form into a chair.

"You tell him, Halsey," he gasped.

Halsey stood up.

"No!" he thundered.

"Twenty-five," replied the other.

Gilpin grew desperate. He made a trumpet of his hands.

"No hotel," he vociferated. "Nothing doing."

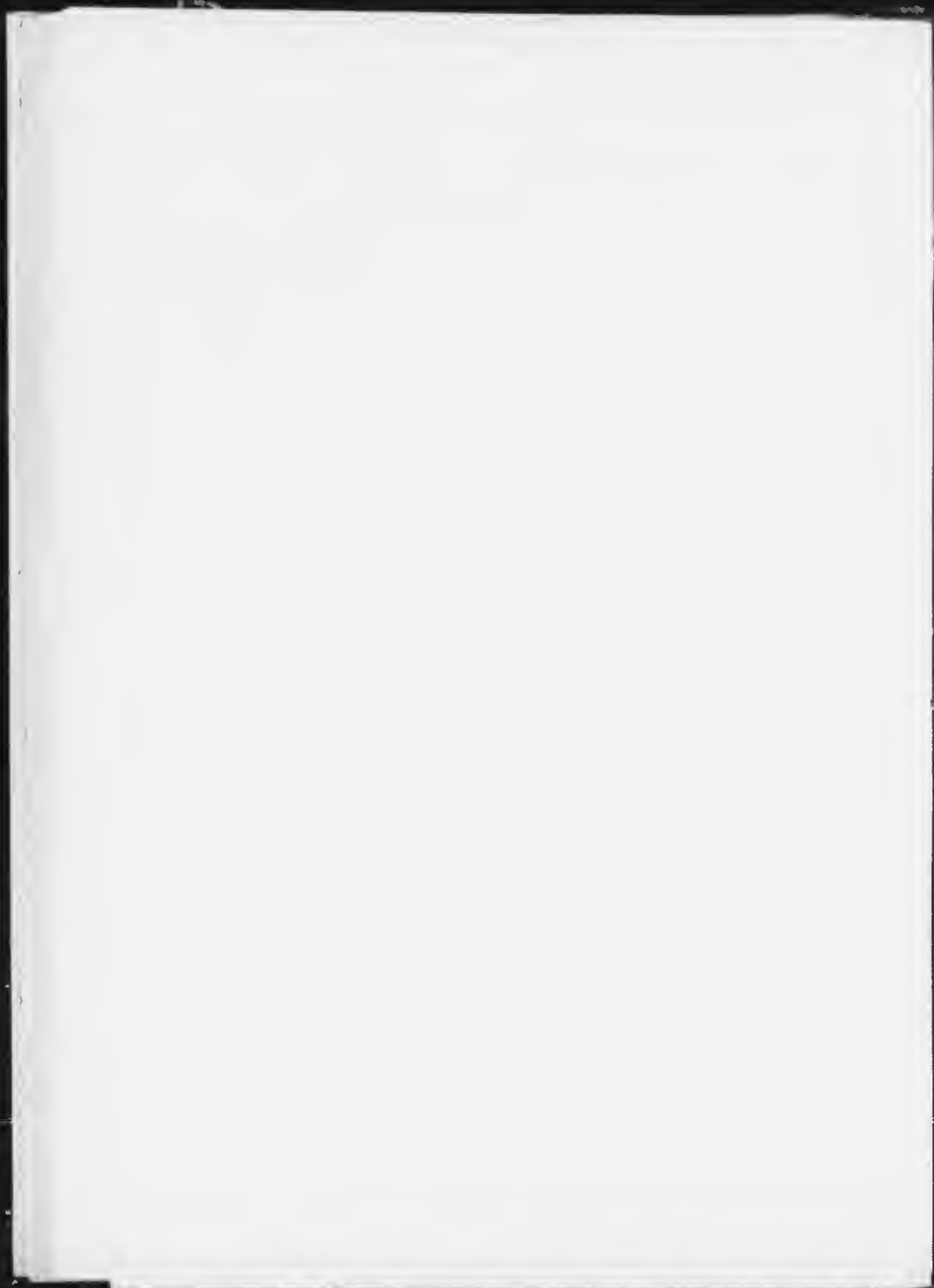
He stood up and pretended to erase the sign over the door.

"Thirty," suggested Mr. Still, smiling with childlike amiability.

The young man waved his hands wildly and



SHE STOOD IN THE DOORWAY



BLUE ANCHOR INN

subsided again into the chair. There was a silence, which was broken presently by the appearance of Mrs. Brooke freshly attired in a spruce linen suit of a strawberry shade, or thereabouts. Mr. Still turned as she stood in the doorway.

"What a wonderful ear he has for color," commented Gilpin.

"I forgot to tell you," said Mrs. Brooke regretfully, "that my uncle is deaf."

It was impossible to be surprised at this.

"We discovered it," murmured Gilpin.

"I am so glad. Uncle never asks any one to repeat. He just makes a guess and takes a chance."

"Fate was against him to-day. Out of twenty tries he didn't hit the mark once."

"He does have his off-days," admitted Mrs. Brooke.

"He is very much annoyed now because we won't take him as a guest at this 'hotel.'"

The young woman laughed.

"Poor Uncle Samuel. He's crazy to stay somewhere at the seashore." She went over to

BLUE ANCHOR INN

the old gentleman, secured his attention, and explained in a natural voice that the house was not a hotel. He looked at the sign combatively, but accepted her word for it without further filibustering.

"Our shipwrecked mariners," said Mrs. Gilpin complacently, "are going to stay to-night in the Other House."

Her husband looked surprised. The Other House was a cottage further down the street which the Gilpins had furnished in a rather sketchy way, but sufficiently for seashore purposes, so that any of their friends who wanted to come down for a week or a month, and travel back and forth, might occupy it. Gilpin, who felt hospitality demanded that they keep the castaways at the Blue Anchor Inn, was about to object to the idea of making them shift for themselves, when his wife hoisted the danger signal, and he, being a sagacious husband, desisted.

"Mrs. Gilpin was kind enough to ask us to stay here," said Mrs. Brooke, "but as we have our own servant and our own food and all our

BLUE ANCHOR INN

own facilities for taking care of ourselves, it would be an imposition to descend on you like that. The house is just what we want, and I assure you we shall be very comfortable."

The matter was therefore settled in that way, not without some relief to both the young men, who did not relish the prospect of carrying on general conversation with Mr. Still. They trooped off together, therefore, and saw the new arrivals safely domiciled in the Other House, bag, baggage, food, servant, sailing master, lady's companion, and all the other appurtenances that go to make up a happy household.

"Where's Brooke?" Gilpin exclaimed, as he and his wife and Halsey were returning to Blue Anchor Inn.

"I think he is in his room," replied Mrs. Gilpin.

"What's that for?"

"The lady's earrings scared him off."

"Were they the material they call jade?" asked Halsey.

"The same."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Thunder!" cried Gilpin. "I didn't get the lady's name," he added.

"That's the funny part of it. She is a Mrs. Brooke."

Her husband sank down in astonishment upon the step of the porch.

"It couldn't be ——" he began, but stopped before expressing the awful thought.

"No, of course no. The name is a mere coincidence."

"But suppose it were she?"

Mrs. Gilpin shrugged her shoulders.

"Thank goodness," she said, "we can tow their boat off to-morrow and send them on their way."

The two men found Brooke in his room lying on the bed reading "Peter Ibbetson" with great contentment.

"What's that woman's name?" he demanded, as they came in, without taking his eyes off the book.

Gilpin slapped him boisterously on the shoulder.

"Poor old Roger! Better stow yourself in the garret now."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

The man on the bed put down his book with such a tragic air of concern that the others burst out laughing.

"Do you mean ——" he began.

"Sure; name's Brooke!" cried Gilpin, pleasantly. "Charmin' woman. Sure you'll like her."

"Like—the dickens!" asserted the other. "Do you know," he added vigorously, "when I saw those confounded ear decorations, I had my suspicions."

Gilpin chuckled.

"Had suspicions?" he exclaimed. "You had a nervous chill."

"This seems to impress both of you fellows as being particularly humorous," returned Brooke, stiffly.

The two men laughed and left him to his misery.

Brooke therefore stayed religiously in his room. At eleven o'clock the next day Willy and Gilpin and Halsey and the skipper of the yawl departed in the launch. Brooke from his window saw them go, and from the other

BLUE ANCHOR INN

window of the room, facing the sea, he saw them bring the launch close up to the stranded yawl. They maneuvered about for a long while, fastening the hawser first here and then there, backing the launch and starting her again, pulling loose the rope, fouling the yawl, choking off the engine, and going through all possible maneuvers, until finally, as if some one had unbolted something, the yawl slid off into deep water and was pulled to a safe spot and anchored. Whereupon the launch went back for her passengers, and Brooke, tired of the room, rejoiced that his period of incarceration was at an end.

But he was just one step in advance of events as laid out by Destiny, acting under the agency of Mrs. Brooke. Whether it was Mr. Still's whim, or because the fatigue of the day before really had been too much for him, or simply because it was what she herself wanted, was not at all evident. She simply came to Mrs. Gilpin and explained that the events of yesterday had been a very great strain on her uncle, and that therefore she deemed it inadvisable to subject him to

BLUE ANCHOR INN

a trip on the water so soon. Could it not be arranged for them to stay for a few days more in the Other House until Mr. Still was himself again?

Poor Mrs. Gilpin was puzzled. She had seen the old gentleman early in the morning, and he had looked as hale and hearty as could be, and certainly very little in need of recuperation. However, if Mrs. Brooke wanted to stay it was difficult to assign a reason why she should not. So, while she was anxious enough to have her guests go, she explained as gracefully as she could that Mrs. Brooke and her uncle were welcome to stay as long as Mr. Still's physical welfare seemed to demand it.

This change in plans necessitated a change of anchorage for the yawl. So no sooner had Gilpin and Halsey and the skipper of the yawl and Willy returned with the launch ready to transport the passengers to their destination than they were immediately sent back again to sail the yawl around the island to a safe anchorage in a cove facing the mainland. It would have been well if all this change of plans had been ex-

BLUE ANCHOR INN

plained to Brooke, but as it was not, that young gentleman sat by the window watching the sailboat riding at anchor, from which vantage point he presently saw the launch on its second trip approach her. It drew alongside and waited for some time. People seemed to be stepping aboard, although he could distinguish little detail in the glare of the sun. The launch, having accomplished its purpose, pulled away, the sails ran up on the yawl, up came the anchor, and she stood toward the south with the breeze blowing across her quarter.

Then, and only then, did he feel safe. He chucked "Peter Ibbetson" at the bed, darted down the stairs three steps at a time and burst out on the front porch where Mrs. Gilpin was entertaining Mrs. Brooke, awaiting the return of the men in the launch.

Brooke stopped in his tracks as if he had been struck. He grasped weakly at the window frame, and stared helplessly at the woman before him. He was as pale as if he had seen an apparition.

"Mrs. Brooke," said Mrs. Gilpin, without a smile, "may I present Mr. Brooke."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

These two young people eyed each other for several seconds without a word.

Then Mrs. Brooke bowed and smiled, and Mr. Brooke, in his turn, smiled and bowed.

CHAPTER VII

WILLY was tinkering with the engine on the launch. Not that it needed to be tinkered with, having been running with smoothness and precision for several weeks, but Willy was a born mechanic, and, as such, felt that it was necessary now and then to give the outfit a thorough going over, which meant wiping all the oil off the machine and anointing it with more of the same oil in the same places ; unwiring the batteries, changing their position, running the engine with half of them, with all of them but one, or with any other different permutation he could think of, and finally fixing them as they were at first ; removing bolts and nuts, smearing the side of his nose and most inaccessible spots behind his ears with grease ; polishing up the brass work, cleaning the fly-wheel and cylinder boxes for one last and final time, and then, having started it going, sitting in front of it and reflecting what an indispensable thing a knowledge of machinery is.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

Willy, therefore, was in the midst of this delightful operation. The Gilpins' housemaid, an inhabitant of the island to whom Willy's superior urban wisdom was a source of greatest wonder, sat on the bank, after the manner of housemaids whose mistresses have departed for a dip in the surf, and observed with satisfaction the scientific investigation of the man in the boat, who babbled on all the while with the easy air of the city bred.

"Take it from me," he was saying, "there's something phoney about the new dame that's just been washed up on the island. I don't get hep to just what her little game is, you understand, but the proper dope on the subject is this—don't never trust one of these tidy females that keeps herself so clean it hurts your eyes to look at her."

The housemaid received this idea in wide-eyed astonishment.

"Do tell!" she ejaculated.

"Well, you know how it is. The skipper on the yawl says she wouldn't never sit on anything but a wicker chair, and every time a fly lit on

BLUE ANCHOR INN

her shoes she went below and changed 'em. Now a loidy that ain't got any more to do than that has got some mischief up her sleeve. Receive it from me, kid."

"I seen her a-powdering of her nose oncet," remarked the girl on the bank corroboratively. Such an operation in the eyes of the inhabitants of the island was a thing no virtuous and God-fearing woman would do.

"I seen her pull that off once or twice too," agreed Willy.

"Pull it off?" exclaimed the maiden, who had visions of some sort of modern false appendage to take the place of an inferior one supplied by nature.

"Help!" cried the man in the boat. "Hester, you are the real ivy green. I mean, in the language of flowers, that I too have seen her dust the talcum."

Rather than again appear to be ignorant of the terms used in polite society, Hester accepted this as an explanation.

"Now I'll put you wise to something," went on Willy, stopping the engine and lowering his

BLUE ANCHOR INN

voice to a confidential pitch; "this running aground the other day *wasn't an accident*. They can't fool your Uncle Willy."

She gazed at him in admiration.

"How do I know?" cried he. "Simple. The skipper says to me,—'Willy,' he says, 'don't ever get in wrong like I did and ship as the skipper on a pleasure boat. I tell you why. There ain't no man's nerves yet that can stand it. Now take Decoration Day,' he says; 'I was laying off to take me a holiday when long 'bout eight in the morning comes the dame and her granddaddy on the first train from Philadelphia and says, get up the ank on the jump.' Then, kid, this skipper fellow has to rustle round and stock up the boat and fill her with ice and the rest of the junk, and all the while the loidy telling him, you understand, to shake a leg and get going."

Willy dived into the bottom of the boat after a runaway nut, and corralled it just as it was about to hide in a deep crevice where nothing but taking apart the whole craft could have retrieved it.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Now you know, kid," he went on, emerging from this encounter with an oily streak over his eye, "there must be some excitement to get a dame like that up from her downy in the morning so as to get to Isle City by eight o'clock. That ain't no pleasure trip for her. Either she got something on her mind, or her granddaddy has, because the first thing they says to the skipper is, 'Suppose you mosey on down past Luggar Island. We ain't never seen it.' The mere fact that's a lie, they being perfectly hep to all the geography of it, makes no difference at all. But when they slides into sight of the place they makes the skipper pull in close to get a view,—or at least that's the song they sings him. He says shallow water, but the loidy and the old party shuts him up, and then when they are coming head on to the bar, and he knows it's a bar and shows them the mud in the water all around it, they won't let him pull out, not one inch; and gee! how they hit that mud."

Willy hit the palm of his hand with his fist to convey the idea of the bump that the yawl withstood.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"What good would that do 'em?" asked Hester, bewildered. "People in their right minds ain't going to run a good boat aground a-purpose."

"You can't prove it by me. Of course it wouldn't hurt the yawl to stick in the mud for a day, but besides getting a free ride ashore and a change of scene, I don't see what it netted them."

"Lots of these city folks is *insane*," said Hester, generally.

"You just moving in to that idea?" her companion queried.

Coming up the main street after their morning plunge could be seen Mrs. Gilpin and the other occupants of Blue Anchor Inn. When Hester saw them she hopped nimbly to her feet and ran swiftly to the kitchen, where she was preparing luncheon for the hungry bathers.

In the afternoon the inhabitants of the inn were apt to do almost anything that occurred to them. Mr. and Mrs. Gilpin were the last people in the world to attempt to arrange any program for their guests or to spend any un-

BLUE ANCHOR INN

necessary time worrying about their enjoyment. Guests should be treated like children, and made to learn to enjoy themselves. Mrs. Gilpin, therefore, having retired for an afternoon nap, and Gilpin and Halsey having elected to go crabbing in the launch, a pastime which bored Brooke to death, he sent them off together with his benediction, and picking up a book at random from the table in the hall, departed to the beach, where, under the cool shadow of a one-time hotel, you could hollow out a couch for yourself in the sand and watch the sea with your thumb in the book, happy in the thought that you could read when you wanted to.

Brooke spent the afternoon thus. In the clear air the sea was a solid dark blue, as if it were done in pastel, and extended far out, unchanging in its tone, to the ruled horizon. A long line of shining whitecaps rode in and burst with a fine glorious roar as far to right and left as he could see. The ships sailed close to shore. The long, black steamship with a red band around its stack, bound for Boston, left a dark streak of smoke across the sky and disappeared sidewise over the

BLUE ANCHOR INN

horizon. A huge seven-masted schooner was loafing easily in the mid distance as though it did not have to get there very soon. Numbers of smaller schooners inched along with similar disregard of time, looking very trim and neat with their white sails, but doubtless loaded with bituminous coal. The sea was full of ideas and things going on. There was such a great, inspiring expanse of it. Here was not the shallow coquetry of the babbling brook, nor the placid unsophistication of the country fields, but the force and poise resulting from experience with man, the elements, and the heavens themselves.

Brooke was revolving these things in his mind toward the close of the afternoon, and thinking what an everlasting joy the unpeopled beach was, when suddenly, as he gazed out to sea with half-closed eyes, he became aware of some one approaching. He looked up quickly and discovered a white-clad figure that was Mrs. Brooke. His first impulse was retreat. He might have scrambled to his feet and walked rapidly up the beach as though a thought had just struck him,

BLUE ANCHOR INN

or he might have crawled hastily through the piling under the hotel and hidden in the dark until she disappeared. But both of these being undignified and somewhat pointed, he decided to stand his ground and await developments. She had to pass directly by him in her walk up the beach. Had it been on a city street he might have nodded to her, and deemed it sufficient, but on a big island occupied by only a dozen people the meeting was an event deserving of fitting ceremony.

As she came within conversational distance, she nodded brightly, and called out:

"How do you do, Mr. Brooke? Are you writing verses about the sea?"

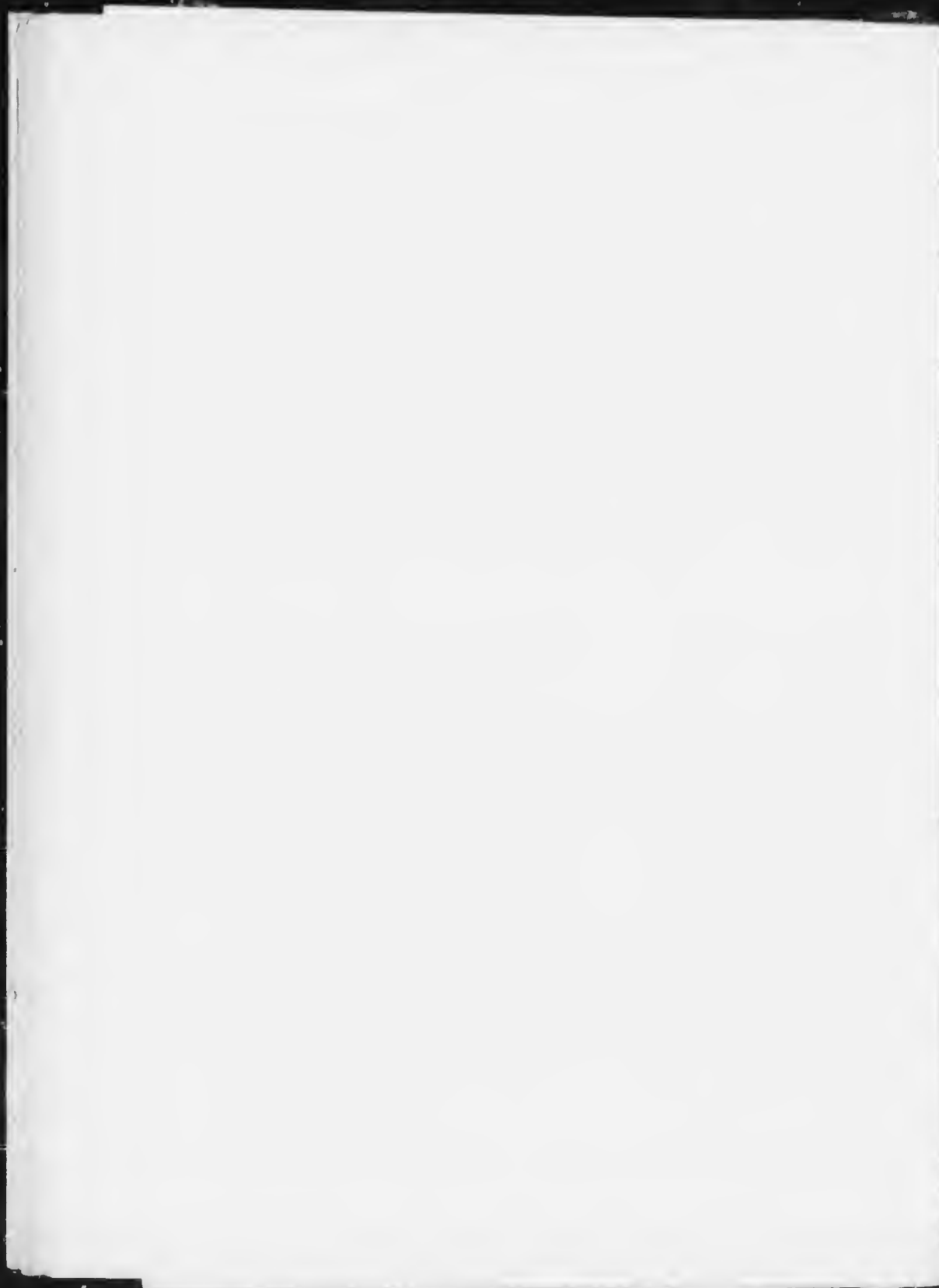
"No," he replied, "not about the sea."

"I adore this wild, uncivilized place," she exclaimed conversationally. "It is so primeval and exhilarating."

Brooke nodded. Of course, he said to himself, he could tell the instant he saw her immaculate white suit, her immaculate white pumps, her white gloves, parasol, veil, and all the trappings of the city, that she loved this wild, simple life.



"I SOUNDS INTERESTING."



BLUE ANCHOR INN

She was now almost abreast of him, and he stood up.

"All this is very delightful," he said, waving his hand. Then he executed what he thought was a stroke of diplomacy.

"Won't you sit down?" he asked.

She looked at the sand, and then at her own spotless attire.

"No, I thank you. It seems dirty."

This would naturally terminate the interview, but it didn't. She seemed to feel that some return of his courtesy was necessary.

"I am taking a constitutional up the beach. Won't you come, too?"

He looked at the beach and then at his attire. He could not think of any of his clothes that would, by any chance, be injured by his walking up the beach.

"Thank you," he replied, and paused for something truthful. "It sounds interesting."

He joined her thereupon, and strolled on up the beach with her.

"We have had so much clear weather of late," he said, "I am sure it will rain soon."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

She gave this idea thought.

"I dislike rain. A rainy day at the seashore is so dismal."

This was a great conversation! The distinguishing quality of the remarks offered so far was that they were so true. Brooke wondered if she too were not just a little overcome by the enormity of the situation. His own embarrassment was profound. Did she intend to tell him she was his wife? If not, was she his wife? He looked at her sidewise for some distinguishing characteristic in her that would bring to his mind in a rush the picture of the woman he had married in the lawyer's office a year ago; but there was nothing about her that induced such a memory, principally because his mind served him so ill as to the appearance of the woman he had married. This person walking up the beach beside him might be she, or might not. He had no means of deciding that.

Reason enough for any man to be nervous! But she did not enter the dreaded field of conversation. In fact, she appeared pointedly to avoid any topic that had to do intimately with

BLUE ANCHOR INN

him or with her, until presently from a fear that she would tell him she was his wife, he worked himself up to a frenzy of curiosity which demanded the facts in the case. So he plunged boldly ahead, selecting his method of attack with some care.

"I wonder," he said, with apparent innocence, "if your family of Brookes and my family of Brookes are connected?"

It was a deadly speech. But she looked him straight in the eye.

"I don't know," she replied, with plain indifference.

He was about to hit the wedge another whack.

"Perhaps your husband ——" he began.

"Oh, *don't* you think they are perfectly beautiful shells?" she exclaimed suddenly. "I must have some."

She walked toward the sand freshly wet by the waves, drawing off her gloves as she went. He did not follow her. Searching carefully among the bright colored little shapes, she selected several that pleased her fancy, and returned with them carefully all tied up in her pocket handkerchief.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

She was pulling on her gloves. The finger of one of them was caught by a ring. If it had slipped on easily she would have had the glove buttoned before she came very close to him. As it was he caught sight of the interfering gold band before it was covered up. No matter what he had thought before, he could not help being startled now. It was his own seal ring!

CHAPTER VIII

BROOKE'S first impulse was to settle the whole matter then and there. She was his wife, and they both knew it—so why dissemble? But he hesitated, and that hesitation lost him the opportunity—if opportunity it was. The incident overwhelmed him. The uncertainty of her identity had, a few moments before, made him anxious to know and have it over with. But when the actual knowledge came, it was like a dash of cold water. It was too real. He could not bring himself to the point of saying, "You are my wife." Why, this was the first time he had talked to her. His whole system revolted at the idea of having to acknowledge the fact yet. He would wait.

So he walked home with her almost in silence, answering, disjointedly, her conversation, but she had no idea what he had seen and, consequently, no notion of the unrest within him, so she babbled on about various things, and, if she noticed his

BLUE ANCHOR INN

abstraction at all, she preferred to ignore it. He left her, finally, without having spoken of the ring.

Whatever Mrs. Brooke's plans and intentions may have been, departure from the island did not seem to be included among them. During the next week she and her uncle became a part of the island and its institutions. If any one ever thought, or hoped, or feared (according to his disposition in the matter) that they would leave shortly, it was an idle idea. For the island suited them exceedingly, from all outward appearances, and when Mrs. Brooke announced that, on account of the great benefit the clear sea air had been to her uncle, they would stay on as long as they were permitted, no one was surprised, nor were the Gilpins displeased. Ned Gilpin's law practice, never too voluminous, dwindled to obscurity in the summer; and the chance now presented to scrape a little revenue out of the house the newcomers occupied was extremely acceptable.

The island was rather a sore point with the Gilpins. They could not get rid of it, and they

BLUE ANCHOR INN

could not very well afford to hold it. The taxes, while light, were for a large acreage, and sundry other expenses were continually arising, which utterly discouraged and demolished any system of retrenchment in the household. Therefore, the prospect of actual rent from the island greatly increased their self-respect. Mrs. Brooke received cordial coöperation in her idea from the proprietors, in spite of the fact that they sympathized with Brooke. But, as that gentleman said, he could go away whenever he saw a storm coming.

Mr. Still's enjoyment of the place was prodigious. He was like some mechanical toy turned loose every morning, guaranteed to run all day. He taxed the ingenuity and patience of everybody. If he saw anybody within hailing distance, he trotted up gladly and captured him for his very own. The disjointed conversations he held with these people were perfectly satisfactory to him. Except when his mind demanded instant information, he disregarded any pearls that might fall from his companion's lips, finding it much easier and much more convenient to guess at

BLUE ANCHOR INN

their import and continue blandly with his own train of thought.

He found Captain John the easiest person of all to flush, and spent most of his days in the company of that amiable individual. The captain must have found the old gentleman excellent company, for he would talk to him by the hour without any apparent attempt to make him hear. And Mr. Still, listening with placid good humor, had just as fine a time when he did not hear as when he did.

Their keenest form of pleasure was crabbing. The old gentleman did not like crabbing, but it was a new experience, and was full of strange excitements, so he always went willingly on the days when the duties at the mayor's office would permit that gentleman to leave, which days were frequent.

Although it is doubtful if Mr. Still ever fully solved the principle by which a crab is elevated from its home to the interior of the boat, yet he went through certain motions with the utmost cheerfulness. He would lower his piece of meat on a string and, when told by the cap-

BLUE ANCHOR INN

tain, bring it up again. Then if there chanced to be an actual crab clinging to it, he would carefully remove his far-seeing glasses and put on his near-seeing ones, lean far out of the boat, drop his hat into the water, retrieve the crab and hat at the same time in his net and deposit them both dextrously in Captain John's lap.

"Cross-eyed fool," the captain would thereupon remark to him in a purely conversational tone.

Then, overcome with chagrin, Still would study the anatomy of the animal seriously for several minutes, selecting the very best place to seize it, and, grasping it firmly about the waist, immediately between its claws, hold it over the basket and wait for it to let go. He never fully solved the crab problem until he discovered one day in the captain's boat a pair of heavy gloves, reinforced at the fingers with leather.

His curiosity about all things pertaining to Luggar Island was insatiable. If he divined, from such words of the captain's discourse as reached

BLUE ANCHOR INN

the inner sanctuary of his hearing system, that that person was letting fall facts about the island, or the inhabitants thereof, or the water surrounding it, or the heavens above it, he seemed to compose himself to listen. And when Mr. Still listened, there were very few ideas that escaped him.

Captain John, therefore, was able to unbosom himself about the community to his heart's content; and if Mr. Still had ever found the information in demand, he would have been able to state at once, after a few conversations with the mayor, the exact price paid by Mrs. Gilpin for her hall rug, or the amount her servant received per month, or the probable income of her husband, or any other such matter of public interest, without stopping to think. The captain explained fully Mr. Halsey's presence in the house, his profession, and estimated yearly earnings.

"Now," said he, "this Mr. Brooke. He's a triflin' young feller. Spends his time inventin' concrete piles instead o' workin' for a livin'. That ain't any way t' get along."

BLUE AN

The old man nodded
"I like th' ole fast
turns out at sunup an
fore breakfast. Why,
to row to th' far end
th' mornin', and that's
Mr. Still instantly
pockets.

"Wait a minute," he

Presently he brought
book and jotted down
named in the first unoc

He took a very viv
tistics. His greatest
piece of lead for the
crabbing line and tak
between the island a
he noted carefully in
the book.

"Fiddlin' ole fule,
form him irritably,
makes you act just
sponge?"

Mr. Still would sm

THE ANCHOR INN

He nodded gravely.

The old fashioned young man that
sunup and does a day's work be-

Why, when I was a boy I used
to go to the far end o' the island before six in
the mornin' and that's two good mile."

He instantly began to delve in his

"In a minute," he cried.

He brought forth a dilapidated note-
book and wrote down the figure the captain had
written on the first unoccupied spot.

He had a very vivid interest in useless sta-
tistics. His greatest joy was to substitute a
figure for the meat on the end of the
sentence and take soundings of the channel
of the island and the land, all of which
he did so carefully in various irrelevant spots in

"The whole fule," Captain John would in-
terrupt irritably, in a low tone. "What
does it act just as if your head was a

He would smile good-humoredly in re-



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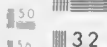
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BLUE ANCHOR INN

turn, and drop the lead in the water with a great splash, thereby fanning the mayor's irritability into a flame, which would result in his seizing the line, pulling off the lead and replacing it with a piece of meat. The old gentleman, following this tactful hint, would thereupon meekly drop the meat into the water and fish and fish.

He was experimenting with his plumb-line one afternoon as Brooke was walking along the shore. Brooke, who had supposed they were crabbing, cast many a puzzled glance in their direction until he saw the object of these investigations was to ascertain the depth of the water. As the boat drew, probably, not more than six inches, and the water was at least twelve or fourteen feet, this performance appeared doubly ridiculous to him.

He wandered on down the shore. There were certain little blue flowers that bloomed there, which he was intending to gather. But their day seemed to have passed, for he found none. Presently he came suddenly upon the cove which was the anchorage of the yawl. The

BLUE ANCHOR INN

cove was a large semicircular bite out of the land, surrounded by trees, and having rather steep banks instead of the sandy beach that characterized the rest of the island. Here the boat lay anchored very close inshore, so close indeed that a plank had been laid across from a fallen tree to the deck. This made access easy, and the young man, to whom boats and their fittings were always a subject of interest, decided to go aboard.

Reflecting on the honesty of a community that would allow a sailboat to lie unmolested close to shore without going aboard and taking everything that was not nailed down, he stepped lightly on the tree and was about to run along the plank, when he discovered some one was before him and was coming up the companionway. When she turned toward him, he saw it was Mrs. Brooke.

He started, but nodded politely.

"I am so glad to see you," she said, "being bored to death. I have just been thinking if I saw you on the way home to-night I'd ask you to dinner."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

The prospect rather disturbed him. He did not reply.

"Well," she continued, smiling, "will you come?"

He could think of no excuse.

"With pleasure," he said.

CHAPTER IX

"I FREQUENTLY come down here to the boat and nap in the afternoon," said Mrs. Brooke. "The silence on this island at night is so deafening I scarcely sleep at all."

"I like the silence," replied Brooke. "It soothes my nerves and mellows my disposition."

She shook her head.

"I like to be lulled to sleep by street-cars, automobile horns, fire-alarms and people playing tunes on pianos. It sounds like human beings. But here the only sound you hear at night is the vegetables growing."

"A purely metropolitan idea," commented her companion. "What time is dinner?"

This ascertained he presently left her and returned to Blue Anchor Inn to change to a somewhat more festive garb, and inform his hostess of his invitation. This bit of exciting news caused the exchange of knowing looks all around.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Well," asked Mrs. Gilpin, "are you glad or sorry you are going?"

"I'm always sorry, of course, to miss one of your excellent ——"

"Rubbish," said she, laughing. "Don't evade the question."

"There is no reason to be sorry," he stated. "Mrs. Brooke has not informed me that she is ——"

"Your wife."

"Exactly. And until she does, I may be indifferent about it."

"You may," observed Mrs. Gilpin, "but you won't."

Mrs. Brooke was sitting on the front porch of her cottage when he arrived. She had on a light summery dress, conspicuous for its perfect whiteness. There never was such a clean and unmussed person as she. She moved about and lounged in her chair, and did all the things other people do, but her dress still retained its original spruce air of having been donned the moment before. Brooke approved of her white, well-shaped neck, her round, bare arms, and her gen-

BLUE ANCHOR INN

eral freshness, which was like a newly-plucked bunch of flowers.

At the table there were four. Opposite Mrs. Brooke was her uncle, who, after his coat collar had been turned right side out, his necktie coaxed down to the bottom edge of his collar, and a length of iron chain extracted from his pocket, presented a tidy appearance. Brooke was frightened at the idea of having to converse with this formidable person, but made up his mind to make the most strenuous effort possible. Opposite him sat the young Miss Grey, Mrs. Brooke's companion. He had never seen her at close range before, and had to be presented to her. She was very pleasant and pretty and quiet.

Mrs. Brooke's table was simply a reflection of her own personality. She took a great pride in having it irreproachable. The dishes and linen and table accessories she carried on the yawl were well appearing enough to be a credit to any household. Mrs. Gilpin had said of her that in the two weeks she had been on the island she had learned more about the food problem

BLUE ANCHOR INN

than they would in the next five years. She had canvassed the island gardens, and found a person who raised asparagus and peas and beets of extraordinary quality. On the main shore she discovered the proper place to go for berries, chickens, beef and a hundred things the Gilpins had purchased directly from a grocery at the point of railroad hesitation where Gilpin took the train for the city. Therefore Brooke enjoyed a very good dinner that night in spite of interruptions in the way of conversation from the amiable Mr. Still

For, as soon as the old gentleman had his napkin safely tucked into his collar, it became apparent that he intended to assume the burden of entertaining the guest. The guest perceived this tendency with dismay.

"Mr. Brooke," said the old gentleman, "I understand from my friend the mayor that you have patented a concrete pile."

Brooke hesitated. He wished to be easy and affable, yet, at the same time, the paramount consideration was to be audible. He filled his lungs.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"The mayor was correct," he shouted, very red in the face.

Mrs. Brooke smiled.

"Modulate it," she said, when the echoes had died away. "Be firm, but not brutal."

He laughed.

"I didn't want him to miss anything," he said, a little sheepishly.

"If he is interested he watches your lips. If he is very much interested he brings out his little telephone."

Brooke thereupon talked in more comfortable tone and explained one or two things about his invention to the old gentleman. He made his explanation brief and general and of such a nature as he conceived would be intelligent to the lay mind. But his companion was by no means satisfied with superficial description. He wanted to get at details. With juvenile persistence, backed up by a mind thirsting for statistical information, he egged the young man on until at last they got to the stage where Brooke found himself explaining things with a knife and a fork and the pepper shakers. Not to be outdone,

BLUE ANCHOR INN

Mr. Still presently brought out his little telephone and most of the time had it so close to the young man's lips that nourishment was impossible.

Brooke explained to him the advantages, in the first place, of the concrete pile over the wooden pile, being, in general, durability and greater bearing power. The concrete pile is practically indestructible. The bearing strength of a pile (all this the young man telephoned to Mr. Still) is made up of a great many component forces, the least of which, unlike the post or column in the building, is its bearing at its base, and the greatest the friction of the earth on its sides.

It must then be very apparent that this factor is by no means constant, as the pile is frequently surrounded by loose sand or by water, which offer little friction. It would therefore be possible for one pile to sustain a weight of ten tons, while another of the same length and thickness would hold up but five tons. Brooke's idea had been to make the pile depend more on the bearing at its base. He had therefore given his pile

BLUE ANCHOR INN

more horizontal surface at that point so it would have the effect of a huge pin, head down rather than a huge pin, point down. Having arrived at this conclusion, the rest was a simple matter.

The pile was made, as all concrete piles are, by pouring the mixture into a hollow tube. It was then subjected to pressure until a great knuckle developed at its foot, which gave it some eight or nine times the bearing power. And that was Brooke's pile. Mr. Still devoured all this explanation like food and drink, and reviewed the discovery from twenty different angles. It was keen enjoyment for him to find a great expanse of brand new facts, the existence of which he had never known before, and rush in pell-mell, gathering right and left like a child picking buttercups.

Brooke was not so devoid of humor as to let his enthusiasm run entirely away with him. He was perfectly aware of the fact that while he was giving the old gentleman the time of his life, the others were not enjoying the dissertation with equal enthusiasm. Mrs. Brooke listened only occasionally, and made side remarks to Miss Grey,

BLUE ANCHOR INN

commiserating herself for having to sit at her own table and endure such dinner conversation. Miss Grey agreed, but at such times as she was not conversing with Mrs. Brooke, listened to her opposite neighbor, and, if she did not find the subject edifying, at least she was entertained by its exponent.

At length the dinner was over and Mr. Still, having gorged himself with information, was relieved of his telephone, and when that instrument had been put away so that he would know again where to find it, was provided with a tall pitcher of water and sent to bed.

When it was moonlight all the inhabitants of the island, save the permanent citizens, sought the beach, and sat in all sorts of uncomfortable places for the fun of watching the moon on the waves. Brooke hardly expected his hostess to agree to any such suggestion, involving as it did such sartorial dangers; but she did accept it readily, and threw him a steamer rug, which, when they arrived at the beach, solved all problems.

Presently they found themselves propped up

BLUE ANCHOR INN

against a sand-bank, reclining at ease on the rug. There was a fine largeness to the night. The long beach had that clean whiteness as if it had been dusted with sugar. The dark shadows were uncompromisingly dark. The logs of driftwood lying on the sand took on new shapes, as of living things. The old life-boat, half buried in the beach, was like a specter craft plowing her way through some phantom sea, and who could say the austere, forbidding hotel, the depths of whose silent shadows no eye could fathom, was not the festive scene of some ghostly reveling?

Brooke looked down at the woman sitting beside him. She was as uncertain and elusive as the other phantom shapes that populated the beach. What was her game?

Why did she not, when she had the golden opportunity, obtain her divorce from him and be free? What complication had arisen meanwhile that made her return to him, still his wife? There was a link in the chain somewhere that he had missed. Of one thing he felt certain. She did not know that he was aware of her identity. This enabled him to bide his time.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

She turned in a moment and found him looking at her.

"Well," she said smiling, "what do you think of the view?"

"Good," he replied.

She clasped her hands behind her head with a luxurious air of indolence.

"Thank you," she said, dully.

He looked up in surprise.

"Are you responsible for the view?"

"As much of it," she vouchsafed, glancing at him out of the corners of her eyes, "as you were looking at."

He laughed. She began to be interesting.

"I didn't realize," he said presently, "how I was staring."

"Oh, I don't mind. I like to be looked at—of course."

When she smiled the corners of her mouth lifted only a little. She had an amused air, as if she had withdrawn from herself and were watching the conversation between them from a distance.

"That is a sign you have a clear conscience,"

BLUE ANCHOR INN

he suggested. This brought the talk a little too near his thoughts, but he wondered if he could displace her self-possession.

But she laughed.

"Or a clear complexion," she amended.

There was no apparent reply to this. Her easy, nonchalant way of taking care of herself entertained him exceedingly. He could not help thinking, since this was his wife, he was glad she was so human, and that her wits were always about her. She was attractive—more attractive than most women. Perhaps, he thought, as time wore on, as they grew to know each other better, and therefore to understand each other. . . . Well! there was no limit to the wonders time could work.

She glanced up at him once more.

"A penny for your thoughts," said she.

"They are entirely too undeveloped as yet," he replied, "to be for sale."

CHAPTER X

WHEN Brooke returned to Blue Anchor Inn at about eleven o'clock, he found Halsey sitting up reading a muck-raking magazine. Halsey looked over his glasses.

"Nice time o' night for an old married man to come rolling in," he observed.

Brooke smiled placidly.

"My youth is imperishable," he explained, extracting a cigarette from his companion's open box.

"Have an enjoyable time in the society of the—widow?"

"Very. Why do you call her a widow?"

Halsey swung his glasses on their wide black string.

"The term *per se* is one of endearment, and distinction—and sympathy. But in due course of time you will be able to eliminate the necessity for this last item."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that your condescension is increasing. You allow the lady to eat out of your hand almost whenever she wants to."

Halsey merely meant this to be a serious statement of fact, but it made Brooke laugh.

"A most ungallant remark," he said.

"Not in the least. The lady in question, whether for reasons of expediency, or necessity, or—you will pardon the suggestion—affection, has assumed the rôle of aggressor. I therefore consider it no discourtesy to refer to her actions from that standpoint."

"But *what* reasons of expediency or necessity?—the third thing you mentioned being an absurdity."

"Legal reasons," responded Halsey. "The sincerity and force of your marriage may have been questioned in court. Perhaps the phraseology of the will was such that some one may be able to prove that a merely nominal marriage will not fulfil its conditions."

"I see."

"I said, *perhaps*," went on the other, anxious

BLUE ANCHOR INN

to present the case in all its phases. "It is a possibility I present for your consideration. My personal opinion is that she is lonely, and being legally united to you, has come to look over the situation before attempting to sever the *vincula matrimonii*."

"That's a preposterous situation."

"On the contrary, it is a very sensible idea. If there is, by any chance, a possibility that you two would be happier together than apart, why separate?"

"True enough," assented the other thoughtfully, "but as regards her own temperament, would her—let us call it womanly modesty, for want of a better term—allow her to appear to pursue any man?"

"Any man, no. But her own husband?"

Brooke rose, and strode up and down the room.

"Was ever any man in such a position?" he said, and then began to laugh. "I feel as if I were being angled for—like a speckled fish in a stream."

There was a silence.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"She is a very pleasant woman," observed Brooke, presently.

"Cuisine satisfactory?"

"Never knew better."

"Did she have something cold for you when you came back from the beach?"

"What a fellow you are for deducing things. You bet she did. Tiny sandwiches with a slice of tomato within, and shandy-gaff."

"Perfect treasure," murmured the other.

Brooke looked at him hard.

"Roger," said Halsey at length, peering through his glasses, "best wishes, old man. Go after her, *vi et armis*."

His companion produced his watch and began winding it thoughtfully, but did not reply.

Halsey picked up his muck-raking magazine, preparatory to reading more about the iniquities of a huge monopoly which appeared to be sapping the life blood of the nation without any one, up to this time, being aware of it but the editors of this particular magazine.

"By the way," said Brooke, on the bottom step of the stair, "since you have been so

BLUE ANCHOR INN

curious about my goings and comings, what keeps you out of your bed at such an unearthly hour?"

The other finished reading his paragraph.

"I was observing a few social amenities."

"Chatting pleasantly with the moon?"

"I—a—made a call," vouchsafed the other, a little embarrassed.

"The saints preserve us! Where?"

Halsey began cutting the pages of the magazine with exaggerated care.

"You having one of the ladies, what was there left?"

"Miss Grey!"

The other nodded.

"Help!" cried Brooke.

He sank into a chair.

"How long has this been going on?" he asked severely.

"Four festive occasions, thus far," responded Halsey, reluctantly.

"The social gayety of this place makes a fellow's head ache. Well, Herbert, I wish you good luck."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

He gathered up his coat and started up-stairs again.

"Is this young person—a lady?" he asked.

The other took up his book.

"My dear Roger, am I a gentleman?"

Brooke raised his eyebrows and went on up the stair.

"Good-night," he said.

"Good-night."

As Brooke was dressing in the morning he saw old Mr. Still stepping blithely along in the direction of the mayor's residence. Regularity at his meals was not one of the old gentleman's strong points. He was apt, when anything was on his mind, to rise with the first crack of dawn, blunder into his clothes by a process of falling over furniture and dropping shoes and toilet articles until the whole house was wide awake, attack the refrigerator and walk obliviously down the street with half a cantaloup in one hand and a piece of Edam cheese in the other.

This morning he found Captain John seated on his door-step reading with interest day before yesterday's paper.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"John," he said with easy good humor, "get your boat."

"Hey," cried the captain, still reading his sheet.

"Get the boat. We're going on a sightseeing trip."

"Oh, 's that so?" responded the captain, into the midst of his paper.

"What're you reading?"

"Paper."

"Let me read it while you get the boat."

The mayor laid down the paper in surprise. Still picked it up and was soon deep in the news.

"Well!" ejaculated the other.

"'Pears t' me 's if the number of crazy people is increasin'," he said at length, and went after the boat.

Mr. Still devoured the news while Captain John was bringing the craft around to the wharf. Just as he was folding the paper up preparatory to returning it, his eye fell on a small item. This he read with interest, and producing his pocket-knife, cut it out and stored it in his pocket.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"John," he said pleasantly, as he sat in the boat, "let's you and me go look at the place where the railroad used to come across to the island."

"All right," grumbled the mayor, "and after that I'll pint out th' place where th' whale swallered the train."

This biting piece of sarcasm was lost on Mr. Still.

"Was it built on piling?" he asked, not referring to the whale.

"They built it on mos' everything," acceded Captain John. "They built it on pilin' and that rotted. They built it on stones which every now and agin disappeared in the mud. And ñn'ly when the whole thing washed away and some engineer fellows told 'em they'd have to sink cay-sons and build stone abutments, they give the whole idee up."

"I want to see the piles," remarked the old gentleman, whose interest in this subject was thoroughly aroused.

"Well, all you got t' do is t' look," responded the mayor, and bumped the boat into the head

BLUE ANCHOR INN

of a pile just below the surface. Poor old Mr. Still's head bounced forward as if it were going to come off at the neck, and his hat and glasses fell down into the boat.

"See that one?" inquired the captain, sympathetically.

"Why, no," returned the old gentleman, simply.

Captain John bumped into another.

"See that one?" he asked, as his companion slid off the seat and occupied a lowly position on the floor of the boat.

"I think," said he, "since they are coming along so fast, you had better stop rowing while we watch them go by."

The captain, absolutely pleased with the success of his humor, stopped rowing. Still patiently searched for his spectacles and hat, and putting them on, with no show of irritation, poked gravely at the pile under water with the blade of an oar.

"'Pears t' be made o' wood, don't it?" demanded Captain John, soberly. He had never seen a person with such aggravated symptoms

BLUE ANCHOR INN

of insanity as Mr. Still exhibited, and he felt it incumbent on him to essay humorous speeches on the subject.

"Seen all you want t', Aunt Susan?" he asked at length.

But Still had not. They rowed up and down along the piling. Every now and again, to the captain's complete disgust, Still would stand up in the boat and drop the lead into the water with all the enthusiasm of a boy dropping a penny in the slot. These soundings he entered carefully in his note-book in the first vacant spot.

"What's the object o' all thet?" demanded the other on one of these occasions.

"How should I know how deep it was if I didn't?"

Captain John determined to test his insanity, to see if it were acute or merely chronic.

"And then what'll you do with the information?"

"John," said the old gentleman in a man-of-the-world tone, "suppose I were to rebuild the trestle?"

Captain John picked up his oars.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"You ain't got many more years o' freedom," he vouchsafed, and pulled back toward the wharf.

That evening when Mrs. Brooke was removing from the old gentleman's pockets the day's haul of old pulleys, pieces of rope, scrap-iron and other useful junk, she discovered the clipping he had taken from Captain John's newspaper. He explained to her that he had brought it home for her to read. It bore the date line of a city in the far West, and read somewhat as follows :

"CHANGES HER MIND—ALWAYS A WOMAN'S PRIVILEGE

"Mrs. Roger Brooke, of Philadelphia, who came West with the intention of securing legal separation from her husband, has found after mature consideration that she does not want a divorce, and has left for the East again in search of her husband."

Mrs. Brooke smiled. Then she struck a match and holding the clipping by one corner, burned it up.

CHAPTER XI

MISS GREY sat on the gunwale of the yawl, gazing out to sea and swinging her bare feet in the water overside. It was a biting hot day. Not a cord on the boat was stirred by breeze of any sort. The only cool thing she had heard of all that day was the water in which she paddled.

A step sounded on the shore behind her.

"May I come aboard?" said a brisk voice.

She looked dubiously at the unprotected members, as if she would reprove them for their indiscretion, and turned her head with a radiant smile.

"I don't know, Mr. Halsey," she cried over her shoulder. "Listen."

She splashed her feet in the water.

He stood still in embarrassment.

"They say it's next to godliness," he ventured at length.

She laughed aloud at him.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"I think I will walk back through the pines," he observed, "and call on you in a few minutes."

"Say five," she suggested.

Whereupon he departed with unruffled dignity and returned at just the appointed time to find her sitting on the deck house with her feet, decently clad in white stockings and pumps, stuck out impudently before her.

"The day," he said, "has been hot."

"And so have I."

"I hope you are refreshed after your—
your ——"

"Bath?"

"Oh, no," he replied, having revised his ideas on the subject. "Some term less utilitarian and more ——"

"More?"

"More nymph-like."

"Thank you, Mr. Halsey."

"What then would you suggest?"

"I should suggest 'bath.'"

He nodded gravely.

"Having then argued ourselves around a

BLUE ANCHOR INN

circle, tell me whether any limit has yet been set to your stay on Lugger Island."

"So far none. I grieve that I cannot give you better news."

"True," returned he, with a weighty facetiousness "You could not give me better news."

She laughed.

"You had a guest to dinner last night," he said at length.

She looked at him curiously.

"Perhaps before you leave the island," ruminated he, "he may become a part of your household permanently."

She surveyed the bows on her shoes with interest. Then she looked up brightly.

"Is there such a possibility?" she asked, naively.

"Well, Mr. and Mrs. Brooke—I mean Mr. Brooke and Mrs. Brooke—are seeing a great deal of each other."

She made a little mouth.

"Don't you think it is strange," he went on, as if endeavoring to interest her with a new idea, "that they should both be named Brooke?"

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Why," she said, with no intention to deceive, "I think one of them might very well have been named—say, Stream."

She looked at him with a cheerful, impudent smile. He did not quite understand her banter.

"I wish to say that you are *very* exasperating," he said at length. "I ask you for information, and I get nothing but dimples."

"After all, Mr. Halsey, if there were a choice between the two ——"

She smiled. He polished his glasses reflectively.

"Well, if it were reduced to that ——" he began.

"Yes ——"

"I think I might dispense with the information." Which only goes to show that some witnesses cannot be browbeaten.

"I never knew such a hot day," she exclaimed, at length.

"What can you expect?" he replied, promptly. "Do you realize that in the month of June the sun is nearer to us than to the people living on

BLUE ANCHOR INN

the Equator? We must naturally expect to have tropical weather."

"But that doesn't make it any more comfortable."

"Of course not. However, isn't it interesting to consider that the people in the tropics, who are wearing linen suits and cork helmets, are not receiving any more heat from the sun than we are at this moment? Now, isn't that a surprising fact?"

"Is it true?" she said.

"Of course it is true. It is an established fact."

She smiled pleasantly.

"I don't know why you don't bore me to death, Mr. Halsey," she said. "Your mind is all full of facts with briars on them. And you keep sticking them into me until I haven't any peace of mind left."

"But they are instructive pieces of information. You ought to think about such things."

"I don't want to think about things that don't interest me. When I see a pretty green leaf, I don't want to have you tell me as you did the other day the thing which makes it green is a

BLUE ANCHOR INN

fluid called chlorophyl, or something like that, which is deadly poison."

"That's just what makes the world interesting," he cried, eagerly. "That is finding out exact information about the things around you, which is necessary for every intelligent being. Or else what is the use of having a mind?"

She tied a knot idly on the end of her handkerchief and then untied it again.

"Of course you understand," she said, "that that point of view takes all the human interest out of life. There are certain things, like hydrochloric acid, for instance, that you can't consider except in a scientific way. But you don't want to be made to consider every flower as a chemical formula, and the condition of the weather as a problem in astronomy."

"It trains your mind," he insisted.

"I know," she replied, "and I suppose I am going right on until the end of time allowing you to practice vivisection on my intellect, and graft into it a thousand foreign ideas that have no place there."

He looked uncomfortable.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Of course," he said, stiffly, "if my conversation does not entertain you, I can make an effort to discuss other things. I have simply been talking about subjects which were of interest to me."

She laid her forefinger for an instant on his sleeve.

"No, no," she cried, "I did not wish you to take it that way. Of course I like what you talk about. To prove it, I want to know now why this white paint has all the network of little lines running through it?"

He glanced at the paint on the gunwale and his eye brightened.

"Why," he began, eagerly, "it is because they used zinc in the paint instead of white lead."

And she listened through the remainder of the dissertation with an amiable toleration, and parted from him later almost with the conviction that she had enjoyed herself.

"I don't see the use," remarked Mrs. Gilpin, at the dinner table that night, "of my having two men as guests if they always run off and leave me with no one to amuse me but my husband."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

Halsey, who had never given the subject thought before, felt a smiting of his conscience.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I fear I have neglected my hosts."

Brooke looked up cheerfully.

"That's not the way to proceed with this conversation, Herbert," he interrupted. "You'll get stung sure as fate if you do. What you should say is, 'Mrs. Gilpin, it is very sweet of you to notice our absence.'"

Mrs. Gilpin laughed.

"As though I could help noticing it," she exclaimed.

Gilpin leaned back in his chair.

"But isn't Halsey marrying rather beneath him?" he inquired gravely.

"Tut, tut," cried the person in question, "aren't you rather jumping at conclusions?"

Gilpin's round face beamed with delight.

"What I meant," he went on, "is, won't it be rather a preposterous situation for Halsey here to marry the lady's maid of the wife of our friend Brooke."

Halsey grew very earnest.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"To begin with," he announced, "Miss Grey is no ordinary lady's maid. I mean by that she comes of a good family. But both her mother and father died when she was very young, and she has to support herself. She does not impress me as having the air of a lady's maid."

"Certainly not," said Gilpin, humbly.

"But what puts every one in this match-making humor?" demanded Brooke.

Mrs. Gilpin made a mouth.

"Match-making," she cried, disdainfully. "It isn't worth the trouble. This affair of yours is the most hopelessly unromantic thing I ever heard of. When it's all settled, there won't be any engagement, or trousseau, or reception, or things to eat, or anything exciting. I call that a poky old affair."

"Also," observed Gilpin, his spherical face wreathed in smiles, "there won't be any presents."

"Miss Grey," Mrs. Brooke was saying about the same time, "what about this Halsey man?"

"I don't know," replied the girl, cautiously.

"What do you think?"

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Well, I don't want to hurt your feelings, dear, but I should class him as a bore."

Miss Grey nodded.

"Of course he is."

"Good-bye, then," Mrs. Brooke cried. "There are few women who can resist marrying a bore."

"Oh, no!" the girl exclaimed incredulously.

"It's the truth. It seems to be the nature of the female of the species. If she sees that a man is putting himself out to make her uncomfortable, she takes a joy in allowing herself to be punished."

"Mr. Halsey is so interested in the things he says."

"Of course. Bores are always sincere."

The girl smiled.

"But he appears to be making an earnest endeavor to interest you—to enable you to see things the same way he sees them. He has made it a practice to pick up information on every subject; so that, if a man on the witness-stand says the buttons on his coat are bone buttons, he can contradict him and say they are celluloid."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"And he bullies you into listening?"

"Yes," she replied, meekly, "I suppose he does."

Mrs. Brooke folded up her embroidery

"I can see the end of this story without reading the last chapter," she announced.

"No, indeed," cried Miss Grey, laughing. "My husband must be a man that is congenial."

"That's what we all say—theoretically! But in practice, if a man comes along who is not congenial but has the perseverance to bully the woman into it, she takes him—with thanks."

"And is sorry."

"Oh, perhaps not. A conscientious woman appears to derive a certain amount of righteous satisfaction from enduring the conversation of her husband."

The girl threaded her needle carefully.

"Still," she observed, "I don't want to marry Mr. Halsey."

"That is another bad sign," said Mrs. Brooke.

CHAPTER XII

ON the following day Miss Grey was making herself a shirt-waist, which, like all shirt-waists in process of construction, had to be finished before lunch time. As she and Mrs. Brooke sat on the porch of their house, Halsey came into view and approached them with long strides.

"Good-morning," he said, with his usual directness. "Are you going walking with me, Miss Grey?"

This was characteristically awkward, leaving poor Mrs. Brooke, as it were, stranded on a lee shore.

"Can't do it," replied the girl.

"Do go, Miss Grey; the sea air will do you good," urged Mrs. Brooke promptly, with a covert smile.

"I must finish this shirt-waist."

"Take it with you," he said.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"No-o. Couldn't we take the walk to-morrow?"

"I have something I want to say to you to-day."

Miss Grey hesitated. Then she folded up her sewing.

"All right, I'll go."

She turned to Mrs. Brooke.

"Won't you come?" she suggested, and the corners of her mouth turned up just a trifle.

Halsey set his teeth.

"No, thank you," replied Mrs. Brooke.

Whereupon the young man nodded to her and proceeded to carry off Miss Grey immediately, before there could be any opportunity for reconsideration.

She was excited and curious to know why he wanted to see her so urgently. He did not talk to her at first, but stalked along solemnly beside her. He was a difficult person to be natural with unless he was talking, and she always went ahead cautiously, with a careful eye for hidden rocks in his disposition. This gave him a certain control of the situ-

BLUE ANCHOR INN

ation—which she did not actually resent, but which puzzled her. She knew that simply in order to be comfortable she would always hand over the reins to him when she was in his company.

They walked along the streets between the tumble-down houses, and when they came to one particularly withered specimen of a residence which had settled so on its foundations that there were no horizontal or perpendicular lines at all in it, he stopped, and they went in.

“Let’s sit here,” he observed, indicating the dingy stair.

It did not seem natural, but she would have been surprised if he had suggested anything else. She seated herself on the bottom step without comment.

“I have been considering our talk of yesterday,” he began ; “about my style of conversation, you know.”

She nodded.

“So that was what was on your mind,” she thought.

“I don’t understand, quite,” he went on.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Don't all people talk about only the things which they are thinking of?"

"But all people," she said smiling, "don't think about the same things."

"I understand that all people are not alike. But in what way do I seem peculiar?"

"Well, for instance," she said slowly, "I am wearing a crimson necktie. Suppose I said I thought that shade was particularly becoming to me. It wouldn't be an especially graceful speech on my part, but as I think it I should be apt to say it. What would you reply to that?"

He considered a moment.

"I suppose I should be apt to say that that shade was made with the dye from cochineal insects."

"Exactly," she cried. "But the average man would probably have told me it was becoming on account of the contrast it made with my hair."

"Is that a better style of conversation?" he demanded, incredulously.

"Most minds seem able to assimilate it with less effort," she replied.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"But, in my case, do you wish me to talk to you like that?"

She laughed.

"I am afraid you couldn't."

He frowned.

"Then—what is the remedy? Not to talk at all?"

"Certainly not. I am not attempting to change the leopard's spots. Whenever you wish to talk to me"—she thought of Mrs. Brooke as she said it—"I shall always enjoy anything you have to say. You must never take any of my criticisms too seriously."

He was silent for a moment.

"I am very glad," he said. "You are the only girl ——"

He hesitated. She looked at him curiously, wondering what this talk was leading to.

"The only girl—what shall I say—whom I ever enjoyed conversing with. There seems to be a sympathy between us. And when I thought last night that perhaps I was peculiar and I wearied you ——"

"Nonsense," she said.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"When I thought that, I could not wait until I saw you and found out."

She nodded. He was looking straight into her eyes. Then he reached forward and took her hand. She felt everything was going too fast. She must do something to divert him. With a deft movement she pushed her watch through her belt and it fell on the wooden step. That broke the spell—and at the same time the crystal of the watch.

He instantly forgot what he was going to say and reached for the watch. In a second he had the back of it open and was examining its interior with the aid of a pocket magnifying glass. Having pronounced that uninjured, he delicately and skilfully removed the crystal from his own watch and replaced it on hers. When they went out from the house upon the hot street ten minutes later, he had apparently forgotten their previous conversation.

Brooke saw them come out of the house, and smiled reflectively as he followed slowly down the street. He was strolling idly toward the sea, wondering what marvelous force of nature

BLUE ANCHOR INN

made it possible for the hot air to remain so absolutely stationary ; he was suddenly surprised to hear his name called, and, turning round, discovered old Mr. Still trotting along after him. It took but one glance to see that he was in the midst of a statistical convulsion. His hat was thrust on the back of his shining head, his face was red with excitement, his hands trembled, and all the pores of his skin were open ready to receive information. He grasped Brooke firmly by the coat lapel.

"Are you busy this morning?" he asked, breathlessly.

The young man tried to think of something, but the effort was a dismal failure, so he replied in the negative.

"I want you to go on a little expedition with me," exclaimed Still, thereupon, very much excited at the prospect. "I have found the place where the piling of the old railroad trestle is still standing. I want you to go with me and see it."

"I've seen it," replied Brooke.

"You would like to," exclaimed the other,

BLUE ANCHOR INN

briskly. "Excellent! It will interest you. Right in your line. I love to see a young man enthusiastic about his business."

"I'm on a vacation now," objected the other.

"Certainly. Just like a vacation. I'll enjoy it myself. Suppose we start before it gets hot."

Brooke looked at the incorrigible old gentleman and laughed. It was almost miraculous the way he managed to hear only the things which fitted in with his own desires.

"How do we get there?" he inquired, deeming further objection futile in the face of such odds.

"We'll take John's boat," exclaimed Mr. Still briskly. "There it is."

He pointed to the lumbering rowboat now in process of blistering on a glaring bosom of the channel. He might well have passed for Charon indicating the ferry across the Styx.

Even a less acute intellect than Brooke's would instantly have divined who was expected to propel the boat. The young man glanced about for relief. Just at that moment Willy happened to be approaching.

"Oh, Willy," he cried, "are you busy?"

BLUE ANCHOR INN

Approaching thus on the spur of the moment, Willy lost his presence of mind too, and answered in the negative.

"Suppose you take Mr. Still and me in the launch up to the old trestle."

Willy looked dubiously at Mr. Still.

"Captain John says it's going to storm," he said, tentatively.

"Nonsense, you rascal," cried Brooke; "that can't happen before afternoon, if at all."

The boy relented.

"Sure thing. I'll take you up. Mr. Gilpin says youse was to have the put-put whenever you wanted it."

They therefore followed the mechanic to the dock where the launch lay. Willy stepped aboard.

"Get on to the smoothness of the water," observed he, pointing to the mirror surface of the channel. "That's the camm that precedes the storm. The hot weather is going to bust some time to-day."

"Let her bust," observed Brooke, stepping aboard.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"You better stand on the old party's ear and break it to him gentle that one more lawser on his yawl won't do no harm."

"Is that so?" demanded the young man, pricking up his ears.

"Surest thing you know. They got one little hook out in the mud, and a one inch line made fast to a tree ashore. That lets her stern swing all around the dock."

"I'll tell him," said Brooke.

He went forward to where the old man was playing solitaire with a jumble of figures selected from the more legible spots in his impossible note-book.

"Let's go down by your yawl," the young man observed, "and put an extra fastening on her."

"Certainly she's extra fast," returned Still, with his nose in his book. "I've been in her before."

Brooke shook him by the shoulder to gain his attention.

"Your yawl," he began, pointing south to where she lay, determining to give him the idea

BLUE ANCHOR INN

in sections. The old man jumped excitedly to his feet.

"No, not that way. This way, this way!" he cried, pointing north to where the trestle lay. "There. You can see what's left of it on the shore."

"I know. I understand," said Brooke patiently persistent, "but it is going to storm this afternoon."

Whether the old man thought Brooke was trying to formulate an excuse for not going, or whether his hearing was really not up to the mark that day, it was impossible to tell. At any rate his train of thought could not be shifted over to any other subject than the old railroad trestle.

"Go ahead," said Brooke to Willy. "We'll go down when we come back and take a rope from the yawl's stern."

Old Mr. Still had a capacity for childlike enjoyment that was positively marvelous. As they approached the spot where the trestle had been he was like an eight year old boy coming in sight of the circus tent. He plied Brooke

BLUE ANCHOR INN

with questions until the young man's throat ached with shouting. How much did it cost to drive a wooden pile? How many could one machine put in in a day? Were they practical in salt water? Then having pumped the well dry on that subject, he switched around and asked the same questions all over again about concrete piles, and every once in a while he would bring out his crazy note-book and smother it with figures while Brooke got his wind. Willy was almost exhausted with joy at the performance.

"Tell it to him, Mr. Brooke," he would mutter. "Blow it down his ear. You got the crowd with you."

It is doubtful if this would have encouraged Brooke had he heard it, but during the conversation it began to dawn on him that the old man, besides simply storing his mind with hard facts, really comprehended the purport and meaning of them. He could refer back to what Brooke had told him before, and connect apparently irrelevant information in a surprisingly convincing way. Brooke wondered if this were

BLUE ANCHOR INN

merely the abnormal brilliancy of a failing mind, or whether Still really was more rational than the world believed him.

At any rate, they went five times up and down the former course of the trestle, poking at ends of rotten piling, examining the remains of old stone abutments and figuring out the probable method—or lack of method—by which the track had been supported. When the young man found his companion was quite sanely, even if somewhat strangely, interested in the proposition as an engineering accomplishment, he entered into the discussion of it with some show of enthusiasm. In fact, in picking out the old supports here and there, and observing the bad state of the whole affair, the thing became to him a potential problem as well as a matter of history. No man in any line of endeavor ever saw a bad example of his own particular work without the spark of egotism in him rising to point out the proper way of doing it next time.

Mr. Still, with his almost juvenile intuition, discovered the line of thought in Brooke's mind and followed the scent eagerly. Brooke, for his

BLUE ANCHOR INN

part, needed only the starter. After that he was soon deep in the exposition of his idea for a hypothetical trestle across the channel. This naturally involved the use of his own pile. The explanation took half an hour in the blazing sun, while Willy ran the launch around in circles. At the end of that time Mr. Still had half a dozen sketches on scraps of paper showing the proper method of accomplishing this wonderful feat. He studied over these documents assiduously for a while.

"How much will it cost?" he demanded in his hollow voice.

The young man took thought, and named a sum. His companion immediately became stricken with an impenetrable deafness, and no amount of shouting could apparently get the figures into his head. They had to be written out on paper before he could comprehend them. He studied the amount for a moment.

"Would your firm build it for that?"

The other looked at him in surprise.

"Yes," he said good-humoredly, "with a little more for contingencies."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"How much?"

"Go to it. Keep right after him, kiddo," said Willy to the septuagenarian.

Brooke laughed. He mentioned a figure; but the old man's ear passages seemed to be useless for receiving sums of money. His companion therefore wrote it on one of the sheets of paper, but to his surprise this did not satisfy the other, who beat about the bush a little more, evidently seeking for something else.

At last a suspicion flashed across Brooke's mind. He seized a piece of paper and wrote, "I propose to build the trestle for twenty-five thousand dollars," dated it and signed his name.

The old man instantly gathered up all the papers in a tight little roll and stuffed them in his pocket. Brooke, with a queer expression on his face, told Willy to make for the wharf.

CHAPTER XIII

THE afternoon started with the rumble of thunder in the distance. The four people on the porch at Blue Anchor Inn scanned the perfect blue heavens inquiringly. Captain John, who had just been down to the shore to drag his heavy boat up on the bank, paused as he went by to pass a few remarks on the state of the weather.

"Coming plum out o' th' north," he prophesied, pointing to as clear a bit of heaven as it had ever been their privilege to witness. "I've just been down to take a few extra hitches on my dory. Better get your launch made fast, Mr. Gilpin. This ain't goin' to be an ordinary summer rain."

"How about the yawl?" asked Brooke, remembering what Willy had said.

"I'm on my way down t' see her skipper," responded the mayor. "I seen Mrs. Brooke goin' down along the shore a few minutes ago. Had

BLUE ANCHOR INN

her white sunshade with her 's usual. I reck'n she won't take her aft'noon nap in th' yawl, though, when she hears the wind and thunder startin'."

"We must ask her in here when she returns," said Mrs. Gilpin. "I know she will be frightened. I will go over presently and ask Miss Grey too. We will have a regular thunder and lightning party."

She glanced mischievously at Halsey.

"Are we—urged to attend?" asked that gentleman.

"That's what the party's for," she replied, pleasantly.

Thereupon they all trooped down to the boat landing and made the launch fast, putting her leather cushions away in the lockers, covering her engine and steering gear with the tarpaulins, and making her generally shipshape and tidy to withstand the coming storm. Captain John pronounced the arrangements satisfactory.

The sky in the north was now a dull gray instead of the clear blue of a few minutes before. There was a steady rumble of far distant thunder,

BLUE ANCHOR INN

apparently coming from behind the gray clouds. The air was no longer still and hot, but a brisk, cool breeze had sprung up, which chopped the smooth water into little waves and made the launch rock at her moorings.

"How long before the storm will be here?" asked Brooke of the captain, looking north at the lowering clouds.

"In ten minutes nobody'll need a sunshade," he replied. "That storm is comin' down the coast at a two-forty gait."

Brooke stopped doubtfully at the edge of the landing.

"I think, fellows," he said, "I shall take a stroll down the island."

Gilpin grinned.

"That's right," he urged; "save the women first."

The other laughed.

"Want to come along?" he asked.

"No, thanks," cried Gilpin; "we have wives of our own to look after."

And Brooke went on alone.

The evidences of a real storm became more

BLUE ANCHOR INN

pronounced as he proceeded. The gray cloud in the east was now jet black. Across this actinic flashes of white light sprang from sky to sea. The distant thunder was like the steady roar of a huge battle. The blue sky was pushed steadily back toward the afternoon sun, and already the trees were casting long shadows in the saffron light. The whole sea to the north was lead, and it seemed as if rain was pouring down at the horizon.

He saw he would have to hurry to get Mrs. Brooke back dry-shod to the house before the storm broke. The cold gale that blew now almost tasted of rain. He looked across toward the sea and saw the rain coming. There was no sun. A darkness like dusk surrounded him. The birds scurried through the trees. A momentary lull, and great torrents of water descended all about him.

Instantly his clothing was soaked. In almost incredible time the ground all about him ran rivulets of muddy water. His progress was impeded by wet branches, wet clothes, wet underbrush, water everywhere. The lightning flashed

BLUE ANCHOR INN

and the thunder banged overhead. For the moment he was terrified and stood perfectly still in his tracks.

Then the consciousness that he was there for a purpose aroused him and he pushed ahead. When he came out of the trees to the shore of the channel he was astounded. Great whitecaps rode from shore to shore, and the waves threshed the banks like the sea itself. He looked toward the yawl, and it was drifting stern foremost away from shore out to the rough water!

For an instant he paused in doubt. Was she aboard, or had she returned at the approach of the storm? He thought he should have seen her had she returned. At any rate it was too great a chance to run. If she were there he would never forgive himself for not making the effort to save her. He decided to go aboard, lady or no lady.

This was more easily said than done, however. He noted that the boat was drifting rather slowly, her anchor dragging smartly in the mud. He would have time to run around the cove and catch her as she rounded the tiny peninsula that

BLUE ANCHOR INN

jutted out from the southern end. This he did, tearing off his coat as he ran. When he came to the point of land the boat was bearing down upon it, running a little faster now, bow foremost.

He perceived that it would come within thirty feet of him, and had some slight hope that it would ground there, but with the heavy sea running there was not much chance of it. He kicked off his shoes, waded out into the water, and as the boat came along, plunged into the waves. The sea was so high, and the water so unruly that he was unable to make any headway against it. The waves rolled him over when they struck him, unused as he was to such aquatics. If it had not been for the lively current he would never have reached the yawl. As it was it carried them both along together until presently he was swimming along under her bows. More from fear of being run down by the bow of the boat than with any laudatory desire at that moment to be of service to any one, he reached up and grasped the ratlines, and with one mighty heave drew his dripping form up on the bowsprit.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

For a moment he lay panting on the long timber, revolving in his mind what to do now he was there. It was not more than five or six hundred yards from where they were to the southern point of the island, and after that the open roaring sea.

He must act quickly. He could feel by the accelerated motion of the yawl that the anchor had dragged entirely free. In a few minutes they would have passed out of the channel. Scrambling hastily down the bowsprit, he began to attack the wet knots of the stops on the jib. He did not even try to find out if Mrs. Brooke was aboard, so deep was he in the scheme of getting enough steerageway on the craft to run her ashore on the island before she could drift out into the open sea.

The sail finally unstopped, he drew it up briskly to the masthead. So fast had the boat been drifting, it was now a matter of nip and tuck as to whether he should be able to get her nose around in time.

"Tightest tooting I ever saw," he muttered, and making three jumps of it to the wheel, threw her helm hard over.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

The bow began to creep over slowly to the port. At the same time the point of the island came nearer and nearer. The companionway hatch opened, and a wet, disheveled figure emerged. He might have seen concern and amazement in her face, but he did not even look at her.

"Hold that wheel over hard," he shouted roughly, and made a dash for the little jigger sail abaft the wheel. He whipped out his knife and cut the stops from end to end.

"We'll make it," he cried, exultantly. It was the work of an instant to draw up the sail and make fast the halyards. The bow of the little yawl swung sharply around, and she made for the shore.

"Hold the wheel," he bellowed over the roar of the storm, and started for the bow, ready to jump ashore with a line as soon as she struck the ground.

It looked as if they had every chance to make it, but the shore slipped rapidly by. The boat was sliding. With an exclamation Brooke made a dive for the center-board halyards. Down

BLUE ANCHOR INN

went the board with a thud, but it was too late. The good yawl slid neatly past the point of the island, and they were in the open sea.

The young man was stupefied with amazement. It had all happened so quickly. He knew there was little chance of their being able to beat their way back against that terrific wind and sea with only the jib and the little jigger sail. And as for attempting to set the mainsail, it would have been suicide, for one blast of that gale would have overturned the boat as if it had been a child's toy. The situation was serious. Determined, however, to show a cheerful front he went toward the stern where she sat. For the first time he saw her face.

In sheer amazement he stopped still in his tracks, for facing him was not Mrs. Brooke, but Miss Grey!

CHAPTER XIV

A LIVID flare of lightning illumined the sea for an instant, and sudden thunder exploded above the masthead. But it was not more startling to him than the discovery that it was not Mrs. Brooke aboard the yawl.

She smiled at him with a frightened attempt at good humor. Had Brooke been less concerned about the storm and the sea, he might have laughed at the poor bedraggled figure. Her hair hung down over her nose. Her dress clung tightly to her, and streams of water ran from the hems of her garments. She looked like a statue in a fountain. He, himself, was in the same condition. All his clothes stuck to him. The only comfort either of them might derive was that it was quite impossible to be more wet than they were.

He went forward to the windlass and hauled up the dragging anchor. When he returned,

BLUE ANCHOR INN

edging his way carefully down the slippery deck, she relinquished her place at the wheel to him.

"There are a couple of oilskins in the locker," she suggested.

"I am afraid I am too wet already," he said. "But you'd better go down and get one for yourself."

She shook her head.

"What are you going to do?" she demanded, as he brought the yawl around into the wind.

"I am going to try to beat back to the island."

The instant he brought the boat around from her course straight before the wind, the gale and the seas descended upon her with all their force. The wind hit the two little sails, and the craft careened until the whole lee gunwale was awash and the waves splashed in the cockpit.

"Afraid?" he demanded.

She picked up a bucket that hung under the seat.

"Not yet," she replied, and began to bail.

When they got the bow headed toward land again, the full power of the gale, the flying rain and the sea fell upon the yawl. A great wave

BLUE ANCHOR INN

hit her bows with the force of a trip-hammer, and she stopped as if she had run into a wall. No sooner had she gained more headway than another struck her—and another—and another. The sea washed the length of the deck by the barrellful. The cockpit swam with water. Had they been at anchor they could not have been more stationary, except for the dizzy careen of the yawl.

“I’m willing to give it up, if you are,” he said at length, as a wave came down the full sweep of the deck and drenched them from head to foot.

“Please do,” she gasped.

He let the bow swing around, and again they ran before the wind. He tried to make the girl go below, but she insisted she was as comfortable on deck as it was possible for her to be anywhere, so they stayed there together as long as the storm lasted.

While they were running before the wind they were safe. Although the sea was rough and tossed them about considerably, they shipped but little water and the boat stood upright as she

BLUE ANCHOR INN

tore along. They might have been considerably disturbed had they attempted to estimate how much distance they were putting between them and Lugger Island. But neither of them was thinking of anything, the results of which were so far in the future. The present five minutes was their only concern. All Brooke hoped for was to keep their craft right side up and above the surface of the water. The question of what was going to happen in twelve hours was too supreme a problem to consider.

Of two possible evils, that of being swamped at sea worried him less than the possibility of going ashore on some reef or rock. As long as they could keep in the open water, they had an even chance for safety. The yawl was a seaworthy craft, and if they could keep afloat for a few hours more, the storm would doubtless run its course. Following out this line of reasoning, Brooke, therefore, kept her head as much as possible to the southeast. He was able to do this without much difficulty, as by so doing he got the wind directly over the quarter. This took them safely away from land and at the same

BLUE ANCHOR INN

time got them further and further from the center of the storm.

The rain continued until about half-past five by his watch, and then began to abate with all the suddenness of its coming. The thunder rumbled off into the distance. The light broke through the clouds in the east, and within an hour the whole black bank had rolled across the heavens and disappeared beneath the western horizon. The wind died down to a zephyr, and they lay rolling on the breast of the ocean, with sea to the four sides of them and the setting sun shining on their dripping decks.

Worn out by exertion and worry, they stretched out on the boards, and let the little craft bob her own way about amidst the waves. The red disk of the sun had already touched the sea before they felt energy enough to move.

"I don't like to seem dictatorial," he said presently, "but hadn't you better change your wet clothes?"

She looked doubtfully at her dripping, be-draggled attire.

"It's not very beautiful."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

'I was thinking,' he said, "that you might catch cold."

She debated for a moment upon a question, of whose exact nature she did not enlighten him. Then she smiled and went dutifully below. As Brooke gave more consideration to the problem, he became a little perplexed. When she had come aboard she had brought no luggage but a parasol.

But he had not given due credit to her ingenuity. She reappeared presently clad in her bathing-suit, which she had kept aboard the sailboat, so that she might swim in the channel. She informed him that there was a duck sailor suit below, which he might wear. He retired to try the experiment of putting this costume on.

The result was very successful. The mating of that particular pair of trousers with that particular jumper was the result of circumstance and not of congeniality. The jumper had the appearance of having been plucked before it had attained its full growth, and fitted with an earnestness and sincerity of purpose that gave him somewhat the appearance of having attempted

BLUE ANCHOR INN

to crawl through a fire hose and stuck in the middle. The trousers, on the other hand, encased him largely and liberally. The final result gave him the graceful and sinuous form of a bottle of olive oil.

He was somewhat modest about the beauty of this composition, and ascended to the deck dubiously. When the ensemble was presently in view, the young woman at the wheel started in alarm. But as the full glory of it all struck her she burst out laughing.

"What's the matter?" he demanded, with dignity.

She thought a moment.

"I think," she said, "you've dislocated your lungs."

He burst out laughing.

"One might well envy the figure of the man for whom this costume was designed," he said, looking down ruefully at it. "In the meantime, are you hungry?"

They thereupon turned their attention to that important item—the food supply. They found there was plenty of water. The tank had been

BLUE ANCHOR INN

filled the day the yawl had gone aground and practically none of it had been used. They found, too, that when they began investigations in the galley the larder had been sufficiently well stocked by the providential Mrs. Brooke to last for a week, if used judiciously. There was an abundance of flour, sugar, salt and such staples, and many cans of corn, peas, sardines, salmon, and other delicacies, in addition to some potatoes. There was also oil for the stove, and matches. They blessed the housewifely foresight of Mrs. Brooke.

With this working material, they prepared the first of what appeared likely to be a long series of meals. For he figured that they must be sixty miles out at sea, and, with light winds, his rather rusty seamanship, and their lack of knowledge as to their bearings, it might take three or four days to return to land. Of course, there was always the possibility of their being picked up (looking at the question from the bright side) and (looking at it from the other side) the possibility of another storm like the one they had just gone through and probable shipwreck.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

The three-quarter moon came out bright in a cloudless sky. The wind was a mere breath. They crawled along on an endless tack to starboard, scarcely making way enough to ripple the water along the boat's sides. The girl lay out on one of the long benches watching the sky. He held the wheel in one hand. The stillness of the night was broken only by the rattle of the jib now and again as he came inadvertently too close up into the wind. It was a strange situation.

Had they still continued to battle with storms and lightning and sudden death, her presence would have been no more disturbing, save for anxiety for her safety, than the presence of a man. But now that the troubled sea had subsided, and the wind had gone down, he was not pleased with the responsibility of the young girl in his care.

As a sedate, married man, Brooke felt his position. Now that he was no longer candidate for the blandishments or charms of young womanhood, he was filled with a sudden consciousness that he owed a paternal protection to them all.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

He surmised that Miss Grey would naturally be embarrassed at being thrown into such intimate contact with a man, and it was his place to dispel this. His reasoning was the natural one for a young man endeavoring to be straightforward and decent in an unaccustomed position, but could he have seen himself through her eyes, he would have found it all unnecessary speculation, for the instant she had looked into his frank, clear eyes she had dismissed all such questions from her mind.

These were the last things he remembered thinking before he unintentionally went to sleep. When he awoke, the sun was rising and the yawl was motionless except as she rocked to and fro in a dead calm.

CHAPTER XV

WHEN Miss Grey awoke as the result of his stirring about, it was some seconds before she realized where she was. Then she stumbled to her feet, rubbing her eyes like a newly-wakened child, and waved her hand to him.

"Good-morning, captain," she said, sleepily. "Have we passed the Azores?"

"I don't know. I've been asleep all night," replied the faithful skipper.

She stepped up on the gunwale and held on by the stays. "Is it deep enough here to dive?" she inquired.

Brooke, who had no idea that she would, replied smilingly in the affirmative. Whereupon, without further ado, she plunged in. He watched her come up and swim about with good strong strokes.

"There's a bathing-suit under the starboard bunk," she called. "Water's fine."

With some misgivings as to his probable

BLUE ANCHOR INN

appearance in this new costume, he went below and extricated himself from the toils of his sailor jumper. The bathing-suit proving to be a good fit, he was presently splashing in the water beside her.

This was a very pleasant way to start off a shipwrecked day. If you can imagine a very young and especially playful dolphin making tildes and parentheses of itself and being here and there and everywhere all at the same time, you have a picture of Miss Grey disporting her agile self in the water. Brooke paddled about lazily for the pure fun of watching her dive overboard, swim about, pull herself up at the bowsprit, and dive again.

He could not help thinking how well she concealed the embarrassment he had decided the night before she must certainly feel in her strange position. It pleased him to think that this was perhaps due to the delicacy with which he had handled the situation. It was a pleasant thought to know that he had advanced into a more elderly and respected epoch of his life and was fulfilling the duties attendant thereto with credit

BLUE ANCHOR INN

to himself and with benefit to others. He therefore relaxed somewhat from the elderly and paternal attitude he had assumed and became again the free and easy, boyish young man.

"How many lumps, captain?" Miss Grey inquired as they sat comfortably at breakfast in the cockpit.

"One, please. Why do you call me captain?" he added.

She glanced at him over the rim of her coffee cup. Her eyes were mischievous.

"Captain," she observed, "is a term of respect, of veneration, and"—buttering a small cracker with much seriousness—"of endearment."

He helped himself to some sticky marmalade.

"What appellation," said he, "could I use in addressing you which would convey the same idea?"

"Rather a bold speech," he informed himself, "for an old married man."

She glanced at him quizzically.

"Call me Yndita," she said.

He eyed her warily.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"No, you don't. You read that name in a book."

"Truly I didn't. It's my own name. It's an Indian name meaning 'rain.'"

"Appropriate in the last few days," he observed.

She paused for a moment in thought.

"My friends call me 'Dita,'" she said, irrelevantly.

There was just a shadow of a smile on Brooke's lips.

"Yes," he said, politely.

She leaned forward with her elbows on her knees and gazed with refreshing interest into his eyes.

"Say 'Dita,'" she demanded.

After all, he reasoned, if he were to act as her guardian and protector, he might properly address her by her Christian name.

"Dita," said he.

"No, no. Not like saying a piece. Say it as though you were calling *me* Dita."

He looked down into her animated, cheerful face.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Did you say," he asked, following the train of thought induced by this glance, "that Yndita meant Rain or Sunshine?"

As soon as he had said it, he knew that this was not well advised.

She smiled ; but did not enlighten him.

"I think you ought to dispose of the breakfast dishes now," he said.

She picked up the tray meekly. Then she set it down again.

"To whom were you speaking?" she asked.

"You."

"And what is my name?"

"Dita."

She smiled sweetly, and picking up the dishes, disappeared into the cabin. Brooke knew this was not in the least the ideal footing for them to be on. It was too intimate, too entirely personal. A flirtation with this girl would produce an absolutely intolerable situation. She was in the employ of the woman he had every reason to believe was his wife. He had a duty to perform. Although he had not married with the intention of loving and cherishing his wife forever, the re-

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"YOU MUST TAKE A VERY TINY BITE"



BLUE ANCHOR INN

sponsibility of that wife was imposing and final. She blotted out forever the image of every other woman.

Therefore he saw immediately the only solution of the problem was to tell her he was married. That would not be a very easy thing to do, as it had the air of presupposing it would make any difference to her. However, he would do the thing very casually, some time when it would appear as if the idea had just sprung into his head. And when she had classified him according to this new information, it would make it possible for him not to be sensible to her fascinations—without thereby seeming to be disrespectful to her.

His opportunity came very soon. That evening for dinner she baked biscuit, which she took doubtfully to him to taste as he sat at the wheel urging the reluctant yawl against a light fitful wind.

"You must take a very tiny bite," she said, "and if it makes you ill, you mustn't eat any more."

Brooke, who came of a family of brave men,

BLUE ANCHOR INN

took the biscuit and tasted it without an instant's hesitation.

"Does it make you ill?" she demanded immediately.

"Not yet."

She waited a while with ill-concealed impatience.

"I think they're good," he said.

She laughed in great delight.

"I think you would be an ideal husband," she cried.

He seized this opportunity.

"I am," he replied.

After he had said it, the idea did seem rather dragged in by the horns.

She opened her eyes wide.

"An ideal husband?" she said.

He saw that his statement had been a little too general.

"Just a husband," he corrected.

She sat down on the seat in surprise.

"Think of you being married."

Brooke had nothing to say, so he did as directed.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Does your wife," she asked, "make as good biscuits as these?"

He was embarrassed.

"Well, she—she—in fact, I don't believe she ever made biscuits just like these."

The girl considered.

"Is your wife a blonde or brunette?"

The young man shifted his position uneasily while he considered this.

"She has golden hair," he said, boldly, Mrs. Brooke's hair having a tendency in that direction.

"Tell me some more about her," she demanded with interest.

He cudgeled his brain.

"Well, she is very well dressed, and good looking, and entertaining—and ——" He paused in embarrassment. "That's about all I can think of just now," he said.

She looked at him queerly.

"It's a very comprehensive description," she observed. "But I mustn't stand here gossiping, when I have dinner to get."

He gazed after her with interest. He began to realize that the paternal and protecting posi-

BLUE ANCHOR INN

tion he had decided to occupy was no longer tenable. He did not feel paternal and protecting. There was a pleasant air of companionship about her that made it impossible for one to be deliberately aloof and afar off.

His experience with women had been rather spasmodic and unexciting. If during all his young manhood there had been no girls whatever in the world, it would have left no gap in his life. His interest had been first of all in paying his way through college, second, in getting his money's worth while at college, and third, in keeping up with the few men friends he found time to cultivate. To him, women had meant the friends of his mother, whom he met when he went home ; and the sisters of his companions who were brought to college dances to be waltzed with, fanned, and returned to their respective spots along the wall where they kept their scarfs, handkerchiefs, and, sometimes, their mothers.

Brooke had never had an unfavorable opinion of them. In fact, they had been nice. If he had said something funny, they had been

BLUE ANCHOR INN

willing to laugh. Sometimes they had said interesting things to him. But he had found that on such social occasions they conversed irrelevantly, or excitedly, or simply for the sake of saying something. He had been unfortunate enough never to come across a girl who would lay aside the superficial manners that are necessary in the complicated civilization in which we live and take the trouble to invite his attention to the elemental and human feelings that were in her heart—just as in every man's. Such a person he could have treated as a companion, and to her would have been said the real things he felt.

However, as no such girl had happened to appear, he had continued to be of the opinion that the sex was somewhat a failure as far as he was concerned.

He was therefore surprised to find himself taking pleasure in the presence of Miss Grey. It was comfortable to have her consider his wants and pleasures, to have her bustle up on deck when it grew cooler in the evening and insist, with an air of motherly concern, that he put

BLUE ANCHOR INN

on the sweater she had rooted out of one of the lockers below ; to have her, as soon as she found he liked a certain thing which the materials at hand permitted them to have, sit down immediately with a forlorn cook-book in her hand and puzzle out how it was made, with frequent calls upon him for his opinion upon this point or upon that.

It was a pleasure to have her wandering inquisitively about the boat, finding at every turn strange things that required explanations, arguing about the old established rules of seamanship which she did not "see any sense in," learning how to do things and then doubting the advisability of doing them that way, and so forth. He felt, as he had never felt in the case of any other woman, her physical charm. Her round, white arms, which the rolled-up sleeves left bare, pleased him. When her hand had touched his that morning as she passed him his coffee, he had experienced a little unfamiliar tremor of interest,—no, perhaps of so strong a sentiment as excitement—which had never occurred on similar occasions heretofore.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

Presently, interrupting his reveries, she came running back with a burn on her wrist. She carried a package of soda and a piece of muslin in her hand.

"Are you sorry?" she demanded, pathetically.

"Yes," he said.

"Very sorry?"

"Extremely sorry."

She knelt down before him and put the soda and the muslin and the wrist on his lap. He bound up the injured member carefully. When he was making the final knot in the bandage, he pulled it too tight over the burn. She winced. He leaned over instantly and kissed the enswathed wrist.

She laughed lightly, and held up the other one. But he did not kiss that.

CHAPTER XVI

“**B**UT,” said Brooke, “there is no doubt that you are still very much of a child.”

She stopped in the midst of sweeping the cockpit.

“Now, what could you mean by that?” she cried.

“I have been making a study of your character.”

She dropped upon the cockpit seat, and balanced the broom across her knees.

“All right,” she said, expectantly. “Tell me about it.”

“I hadn’t meant it for publication,” he replied, laughing.

“Oh, tell me anyway.”

“Well,” said he, slowly, “your first salient characteristic ——”

“Yes,” she cried, eagerly.

“Is curiosity.”

BLUE ANCHOR INN

Her face fell. She looked at him hard and they both burst out laughing.

"Now, the other salient characteristics, please," she said, sweetly

"First of all among them, an amiable and charming disposition."

She checked it off on her little finger with the handle of the broom.

"Second, poise, aplomb, self-possession."

She checked on her ring finger.

"How did you deduce that?"

"When we went adrift," he asserted, "instead of wringing your hands and being generally in the way, you bailed out the cockpit. Now, instead of wondering when under the canopy you are ever going to get on dry land, you bake biscuits."

She pursed her lips.

"That's only common sense. I don't think that is such a great compliment."

"Please get it out of your head that I am trying to compliment you," he said. "Nothing is further from my thoughts."

"Yes," she replied, meekly.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Salient feature number three," he went on, "would be industry."

She moved the broom-handle reluctantly to the next finger.

"One of those homely old virtues—but I don't mind counting it."

"It is one of the best virtues we have," he asserted. "I might add to that, as a corollary, capability."

"That's just as big an insult as the other. Isn't there anything more exciting on your list?"

He smiled good-humoredly.

"Well," he said, "there is one more, and that is the one I like best."

She lost the count on her fingers and leaned forward with her elbows on her knees.

"Yes," she said.

"You are so sincerely a human being," he began. "There is no veneer of humanity on the surface, with simply a lifelike clockworks within." He paused a moment. "That doesn't explain exactly what I mean. I think all I am trying to say is that I find you tremendously congenial."

She colored with pleasure.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"And still," she said, slowly, quoting him, "there is no doubt I am very much of a child."

She looked out across the twilight sea, and then she began to laugh.

"Why do you laugh?"

"Oh, dear," she complained, "I never could be lugubrious enough to convince people I had any brains at all."

"Your brains haven't been called into question," he observed.

"Oh, yes, they have. I have made a mistake—a fatal mistake. I should have adopted an attitude of extreme seriousness. I should never have sat down with one foot curled up under me—as at present. I shouldn't have laughed—because I have dimples. Those things indicate immaturity. And immaturity, captain, is nothing more or less than an inability, at present date, to cope successfully with the serious problems of life. Isn't it so?"

"Yes—and no," answered he, temporizing.

"You know it is."

"Perhaps what you say is true. I hadn't gone so deeply into it."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

She rose.

"Oh, well," she sighed, "some day I shall convince you that I am not so disgracefully young."

She looked over the gunwale at the dark waters reflecting the night and the stars, and, seeming even more dark, the dull light of the cloud-obscured moon. She shuddered.

"The ocean is ugly at night," she said.

"Then you wouldn't care to dive in now?"

She came away and sat down again.

"No. I don't like it. It is like some huge monster—a huge reptile."

"If you will take the wheel," he said, "I will light the running lights." He took a box of matches from his pocket. "Did you ever realize just how much two oil-lamps mean to us? They are our eyes and ears. Those two on a cloudy night might mean just the difference between being run down or being picked up."

She nodded. The threadbare idea had a very real meaning to these two mariners bobbing about on the open sea. They could not help

BLUE ANCHOR INN

having a strong affection for the red and green eyes of the boat.

"Am I too young to suggest something?" she asked presently.

He looked at her warily.

"No," he replied.

"Then I should suggest that you investigate their contents. No one knows when they were filled last."

He made a wry face.

"I knew I was going to be shown up," he said. "I never thought about it."

The lamps proved upon investigation to be all but empty.

"Jingo!" he cried.

"Well," he said, in a moment, "is there any oil?"

She was thinking.

"I think I know where it ought to be. Take the wheel, please."

He took the wheel, and waited anxiously for several minutes. At the end of that time she emerged from the cabin with a dusty oil can. A potato was stuck over its spout to keep its con-

BLUE ANCHOR INN

tents from spilling. When they unscrewed the top they discovered it half full of kerosene. She screwed it on again.

"Isn't that bully?" she cried.

"It helps a great deal," he responded, contentedly.

Putting the can on the deck-house she ran forward to get the lamps, looking, in her bathing-suit (which she had been compelled to put on by reason of having upset a saucepan on her dress), very much like a nymph or dryad, or some other such graceful creature. He smiled approvingly as he looked at her. Perhaps his interest in her made him just a little less attentive to the other things about him than he should have been.

"Don't come aft yet," he called. "I'm coming about."

"All right," she replied.

He threw the wheel over, and she waited for the big sail to swing across to the other side.

"Careful!" she ejaculated, suddenly. "Wait a minute!"

He looked up, threw the wheel back hard, but it

BLUE ANCHOR INN

was too late! The boom struck the can on the deck-house and knocked it clear off. It fell on the gunwale, balanced a moment and then as the craft listed to leeward slid out into the water. Brooke made two jumps to the side, but the tin cylinder was gone when he got there.

He was dumbfounded.

But before he had time to actually realize what had happened, Dita was at his side, standing on the gunwale. What she was about to do never entered his head, until, after a moment's hesitation, she leaned calmly forward and plunged into the somber tide!

He caught his breath in astonishment and stood for an instant dazed. It was an act of boyish courage and perfect control. He could not but notice that even in the excitement of the moment she had made a perfect dive and entered the sea with scarcely a splash.

His every impulse was to plunge in after her; but he knew his place was on board. He ran to the wheel and held the yawl's head up in the wind. He strained his eyes and ears astern. Sometimes he thought he could hear the girl

BLUE ANCHOR INN

above the noise of the cracking canvas. He could not see because the faint glimmer of the moon under its cloud made deceiving reflections on the rolling water. He would have sailed after her had he not been afraid of getting too great headway before the wind, and losing her position entirely. Picking up the helmsman's megaphone he began calling, so that she would not miss her direction.

Presently after what seemed to be hours he heard her voice calling.

Deserting the helm, he ran to the side to help her aboard. She came into view paddling along with the oil can under her arm! He reached down and pulled them both over the side. Then he drew a long sigh of relief.

"I didn't know what was happening to you," he said.

She smiled.

"You aren't going to be rid of me so easily as you think."

He picked up the blanket he had ready and threw it over her dripping shoulders.

"Now run down and change those clothes,

BLUE ANCHOR INN

quickly," he cried. "And when you come up I'll tell you what a wonder you are."

She stopped.

"Tell me now."

"Not a word. Please run on before you catch cold. I'm thoroughly ashamed for not having gone overboard myself. But I thought the con-founded can had sunk at once to the bottom of the sea."

She stopped in the companionway.

"So did I at first," she cried eagerly. "And then I remembered that it was all closed up tight and being half full of air, would therefore probably float. So I took a chance and went over after it."

"Your brain was working then," he cried, admiringly.

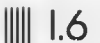
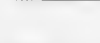
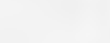
"I thought I never should find the thing. When you're in the water you can't see more than three or four feet away from you. Finally, when I had given it up, I bumped right into it."

"But you're shivering. Please run down and change."



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BLUE ANCHOR INN

"You haven't told me how nice I was to get you your kerosene."

He left the wheel to its own devices, and going over to the head of the companionway caught both her wet hands in his. She looked up into his eyes with a half smile.

"You're a brick," he said, in a low tone, "and I humbly apologize for ever having called you a child. I can never tell you how wonderful you were to do that." He jerked his head toward the sea.

She stood for some seconds without moving. In spite of her shivering, a warm flush rose to her cheeks.

"Thank you," she said at length, and, drawing her hands away, she ran down into the cabin.

CHAPTER XVII

BROOKE was certain that Lugger Island lay about northwest from the spot where they had been left at the conclusion of the storm, and had been sailing (with a great deal more coming about and shifting of booms than real progress) in that direction all day long. The wind was against them and was scarcely strong enough to more than simply keep them moving through the water. At sundown, even what little breeze there was fell away, and the yawl lay still, rocking with the waves.

Worn out with their respective exertions during the day, after Brooke had lowered all the canvas, they lay down on the mattresses they had spread in the cockpit. The girl was soon asleep. He did not sleep, but lay upon his back, staring speculatively above him. Her regular breathing stirred in him a new sense of excitement that awoke all the cohorts of his brain. Her open

BLUE ANCHOR INN

hand lay relaxed on her mattress almost touching him. He could see the round shoulders rising and falling as she breathed. It was a strange thing that it was only necessary for all her conscious movement to be stilled—and he became immediately alive to her physical personality. An unexpected feeling of exultation came over him when he realized that this girl was in his care—and his alone. If those high stewards of Fate who direct the lives of young people had wished to awaken such thoughts in him, they could not have chosen more potent means than to cast them away thus on the face of the sea. His mind thrust aside the overtures of sleep. This was a moment of exultation. It was a piece out of a pleasant dream—and he lay awake to listen to the fine melody in his heart.

At length, however, the wide-awake dreams merged unconsciously into sleeping ones. The sweet little cherub that sits up aloft was the skipper of the yawl. Brooke slept the fine, straightforward slumber "that knits up the raveled sleeve of care." He was awakened after

BLUE ANCHOR INN

a long while by a light hand on his shoulder. It was still dark. She was sitting up beside him, her hands clasped over her knees.

"I wanted you to see it," she said.

Across the sea over the indistinct horizon hung the flattened moon. All its bright light had faded, save only the silver band of reflection across the black waters. The rigging rose across the dark sky, scarcely distinct in the ghostly glow of the stars. The sea, swelling and sinking mysteriously, was unfeeling and repulsive in its vastness. It all seemed supernatural and unreal. No human or reassuring thing appeared upon it. No light moved on its surface. No line on any side showed where the black sky met the black sea.

The only sound was the slapping of the water against the boat's keel. They felt all the strange wonder of primeval man afloat for the first time alone in his coracle on a strange sea. Here was no sight of the deep over the taffrail of a steady, pounding liner with an electrically-lighted cabin at one's elbow. This was the same mysterious sea that Magellan and others sailed,

BLUE ANCHOR INN

and feared lest they should drop over its edge. This was the uncharted waste that the Roman galleys tried, putting out past Gibraltar. There was no hint here of the knowing twentieth century with its contemptuous tolerance of the forces of nature. This was the sky and the stars and the sea itself, which filled two civilized young people with all the savage superstitions of centuries ago and a half-forgotten fear of the great Creator of it all.

She glanced into his face to see if he too were thinking the things she was.

"I had to wake you," she said, in a low tone. "There is something so strange and big about it."

He was feeling about for an expression of his idea.

"I feel," he exclaimed, "as if we were two people set down alone upon a new world."

She gave him a quick glance of sympathy.

"Yes," she cried. "See! It is an absolutely deserted planet. The water extends to infinity in every direction. And you and I are the only living things."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

It was pleasant to him to be linked together with her like that.

"We did not know," he said, presently, "what wonders we were to see when we came on this little journey."

She smiled.

"And to think," she cried, "how hard we tried not to come."

Her hand touched him. He put his hand upon it and she let it stay in his clasp—until the misshapen moon dropped behind the sea. They said nothing during all that time, but a new and wonderful sympathy arose between them. Then they lay down in the chilly night and drew their rugs about them. They did not realize then that they had indeed been set down in a new world.

It was daylight when the fretful flapping of the rigging awoke Brooke. Another intermittent breeze had sprung up. He ran up sail and, bringing the yawl's head up into the wind, made off slowly toward the north. Dita lay with her head on her arm, sleeping peacefully as a baby.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

He did not disturb her, and she slept on until presently the bright morning sun, jealous of Brooke's uninterrupted view, peered over the edge of the combing and fell on her face. Whereupon she opened her eyes, but instantly closed them, as if trying to persuade herself that she was not really awake, but that it was simply part of an unpleasant dream. This artifice, however, proved futile, and at length she had to acknowledge that she really was awake. She smiled dimly at Brooke, and, putting her white arms over her head, yawned luxuriously in his face.

"Now I'm awake," she said at length.

She ran down into the cabin to change again to her bathing-suit. When she returned she brought one of those doughnut-shaped life preservers. She made this fast to a hawser and the hawser fast to a pin in the stern. When she threw the preserver overboard, it floated the length of the line and then followed the yawl, dancing and skipping over the waves, forty or fifty feet astern.

Without further ado, she dived over the side

BLUE ANCHOR INN

and, swimming lazily along, caught the great ring as it passed her. She slid through the water bobbing over the waves with all the exuberance and joy of a very young mermaid. But the skipper presently became alarmed and brought the boat up into the wind. She paddled back and clambered aboard, happy and contented as a child.

She was glorious as she stood there, all dripping with the sea, the water glistening on her bare arms, and her cheeks pink as spring roses with the dew on them.

"You look like an allegorical figure of Undine," he observed.

She leaned over and tried to shake a drop of water off the end of her nose upon an unsuspecting fly.

"Who was Undine?" she asked at length.

"She was the goddess of the waves."

"Then I am like her. See, wherever I go I leave a small ocean on the deck. No one but a goddess could do that."

"Not without being put off the boat."

She wrinkled her nose at him.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"If you are disagreeable to your crew," she said, "there will be a mutiny."

"Are you the crew?" he demanded.

"Of course I am,—or what is worse, a mere scullery maid."

"I am sorry," he said, "that you have to work like that."

She laughed very softly and sitting down cross-legged on the deck, looked at him fixedly for a second.

"I shall be sorry," she said, "when it is all over."

"Why?"

She nursed her ankle thoughtfully.

"I don't know," was all the reply she could give, however. "It's just pleasant and nice."

He smiled.

"That's the way I have felt about it," he said. "All the time I ought to be worrying my head about when we are going to be rescued. I haven't taken the least interest in it."

He let his glance fall on her for just a moment. For no accountable reason, the color mounted to her cheeks.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"The sea," she said, demurely, "is very beautiful and comforting and homelike."

He started to say something and then checked himself. But it was not about the sea.

About noon that day a breeze sprang up dead astern. The yawl ran before it with all the ease and speed of a motor boat. The great mainsail forward hung over the water on the one side, the little jigger sail abaft hung over the water on the other side, and all the canvas pulled and drew like mad. A great letter V stretched away to both sides astern.

Along about three in the afternoon they sighted a motor boat in the distance and made efforts to attract attention, but without success, for presently she turned and made down across the horizon, leaving them alone on the waters. This was a disappointment. But, as Brooke said, with clear weather and a fair wind, they would soon run across other sails. This point was well taken, but in spite of that, it was not until after dark that they saw the red and green running lights of a craft of some sort—coming toward them.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

It was some time before they dared let themselves believe it actually was coming toward them. But when Brooke signaled with a lantern and was answered from the other boat, there was no longer any room for doubt.

This ascertained, he came aft to relieve her at the wheel.

"Well," she said, gently, "that is the end of this little adventure."

"I am sorry," he replied, reaching for the spokes of the wheel.

For no reason at all, she still held them, looking up into his face mischievously.

He put both his hands down on hers, as she still grasped the wheel, and threw the helm over a little to bring the yawl to leeward of the approaching launch. She did not move, but let her hands stay in his.

The dim light in the binnacle threw a warm glow on her face. She returned his gaze with bright eyes, a faint, provoking smile on her lips.

In moments of excitement a man often does the thing that surprises himself more than the world. Something within Brooke suddenly

BLUE ANCHOR INN

gave way. He reached forward and gathered the girl in his arms.

There was a moment of silence. The yawl wavered in its course. He released her. She stood up and walked slowly toward the bow.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE disappearance simultaneously of Miss Grey, Brooke, and the yawl had thrown the island into a turmoil. When the man and girl had not returned after the clearing away of the storm, Gilpin and Halsey and Captain John had sauntered down in that direction to see what could have detained them, and had come upon the vacant anchorage. A search had immediately been started. The entire resident and non-resident male population had piled into the motor boat and started out to spread the news. They had made a landing at the nearest life-saving station, had the news telephoned up and down the entire coast, filled the tanks with gasoline, and made a hundred mile cruise out to sea and back without finding a single sail. It was ten o'clock in the morning when they had returned, worn out and discouraged; and on the instant a half dozen other craft, seeking news-

BLUE ANCHOR INN

paper notoriety, had put out from half a dozen places ; but all they had discovered of importance on the high seas was each other.

It was generally acknowledged that if the yawl were afloat it must be on a line south-by-east from the island, the wind having blown steadily from a point north-by-west all during the storm. It was also acknowledged that having been carried before the wind for some four or five hours, they must have traveled a distance of about fifty or sixty miles. That rendered very definite the spot where the craft must have been, if afloat, at the end of the storm. And furthermore, since the wind after the storm had been exceedingly light, the yawl could not have sailed very far away from that point. When, therefore, the several expeditions that went out to discover her and rescue her in triumph failed to find her within a radius of fifteen miles of a spot fifty miles south-by-east of Lugger Island, and the life-saving service failed to report any vessel ashore, there was but one inference to be drawn. She had gone down. At the end of the second day that was the accepted version. The theory

BLUE ANCHOR INN

that Brooke might have kept out to sea did not occur to them.

"Ned," said Mrs. Gilpin, on the morning of the second day, "what am I going to do about Mrs. Brooke?"

"Do about her?"

"Well, I ought to say something. If Roger was—is her husband, we cannot sit by and take no notice of her."

Ned Gilpin thought a moment.

"Well," he said, "you had better do the best you can."

Mrs. Gilpin thereupon made a call upon Mrs. Brooke. Who can blame her if, into this errand of mercy, there might have crept an element of curiosity as well as of commiseration. There can be no doubt in the world that when she first put on her stiffly starched, white dress, her most formal and uncomfortable summer hat and her hot lisle-thread gloves, in preparation for the visit, no thought was in her mind but the sadness of the occasion.

As a matter of fact the seriousness of the situation had been borne down upon them all in the

BLUE ANCHOR INN

last few days. Here was an occurrence of the same sort they had seen announced with large headings a thousand times in the daily papers and had passed by without comment as being part of the regular order of things. But when such a thing befell, as it did, a person who might be said to be a member of their own household, the tragedy of it left them stunned. Mrs. Gilpin had had no knowledge of sudden death save only in such vague ways as, for instance, having been present in the house when an aged uncle who, alive and well at breakfast time, had died in his chair before noon. Therefore, her mind was now numbed and incredulous. She could not quite believe that the thing had happened. She found herself providing for four people in the dining-room, and when her husband and Halsey came down, alone, ready for dinner, once or twice she had waited a moment, and then suddenly realized that there was no one else to come. On such occasions, the tragedy of it struck her with redoubled force, as if she had heard of the accident for the first time. It was after one of these occurrences that she decided,

BLUE ANCHOR INN

with genuine womanly sympathy, to visit Mrs. Brooke.

But, as she walked along the sandy street, suffocating but beautiful to behold, her sympathetic impulses and even her eyes, still slightly red and hot (from tears shed when her brain had, without warning, begun to speculate as to what she would have done if it had been *her* husband who had disappeared), could not gloss over the fact that the imp of curiosity had a prominent place in her heart.

Indeed, it would have been hard for him not to have been there. For how could one commiserate a person for the loss of her husband, when one was not at all certain he was her husband, without wondering if, in the seriousness of the situation, the truth would at last be disclosed. So, while pity and sympathy sat enthroned in the very center of her heart, the imp curiosity was, if not seated beside them, at least occupying a prominent position on the top step of the throne.

Mrs. Brooke's coal-black servant took her name up and returned immediately. Yes, Mrs. Brooke would see her, and would be down in a

BLUE ANCHOR INN

moment. Mrs. Gilpin's heart thumped. What would she look like when she came? Would she be red-eyed and pale? Or would she be cheerful and willing to discuss the event impartially? It was rather difficult for the caller to adjust the scenery properly, when she was so uninformed of the nature of the play that was to be staged.

Presently, after about ten minutes' suspense, the lady in question swept into the room. If Mrs. Gilpin had expected to get the hint the instant she appeared and arrange the scene accordingly, she was disappointed. Mrs. Brooke exhibited the same careful, spotless attire, the same faultlessly accurate arrangement of her hair, the same well-groomed hands and the same inscrutably pleasant untear-stained face she would have shown had her whole family been drowned at sea. For the life of her Mrs. Gilpin couldn't tell whether it was indifference, or bravado. It certainly was true that, whatever her motive may have been, it was Mrs. Brooke's first thought not to let any one see her at anything else but her best.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Well," she said, instantly, with no intonation, "is there any news?"

It immediately occurred to Mrs. Gilpin that she had perhaps raised the other woman's hopes by coming, and she felt as if it were almost her own fault that there was no news.

"No," she said, uncomfortably. "But no news is good news."

Mrs. Brooke gazed at her visitor calmly.

"I don't think that is exactly true," she remarked.

"In a way, though," replied the other quickly, groping about for something comforting to say, "it is true. While of course it is tremendous suspense for you to hear nothing at all, yet as long as you don't hear there is always a chance that they will come back to you."

It was a very good speech, but she used the pronoun "you" three times too often. Mrs. Brooke raised her eyebrows.

"Yes," she returned, "as long as we don't hear there is always a chance that they will come back—to us."

She added the last two words almost as an af-

BLUE ANCHOR INN

terthought. Mrs. Gilpin colored. It was just as if Mrs. Brooke had gathered up all the sympathy she had presented and put it back again in her lap.

"Mr. Brooke," she went on, bravely, "was such a comfort and constant joy to us. It was only last week I told Mr. Gilpin he was the most delightful person we ever had had visit us."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Brooke without apparent interest. "I should certainly think you would miss him."

Mrs. Gilpin grew cold.

"We, at least, do," she said, with tight lips.

There was a pause. She tried to be calm. Only one thought restrained the rising tide of anger. The lady before her, if she were Roger Brooke's wife, was his wife under very trying circumstances. It would have been hard for her herself, under similar circumstances, to have accepted sympathy from an acquaintance of a few weeks' standing and to have confessed as her husband a man whom she could not but be eternally aware she had bought—just as she would have bought a parasol. Mrs. Gilpin's temper stopped in its rise.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"*I miss him,*" she said, gently. Her idea was to keep the talk still in that quarter, so that she might offer her sympathy more indirectly.

The other still gazed at her with her cool impersonal regard.

"You miss him," she said, speculatively.

"I miss him very much," replied Mrs. Gilpin, innocently.

For the first time the eyes opposite showed a gleam of the personality within. Was that jealousy? Or if it were not jealousy, was it only the effort of a woman, for some reason in a false position from which she could not extricate herself, to assume the offensive? At any rate her eyes showed fire.

"Does Mr. Gilpin miss him too?" she asked, with the air of a person touching a match to the precise center of a charge of powder.

Mrs. Gilpin sprang to her feet. The blood flamed in her face.

But just at that moment Mr. Still entered the room.

CHAPTER XIX

MR. STILL'S presence always succeeded in breaking off any existing situation and starting an entirely new one.

"Mrs. Gilpin," he said, blandly, all indications of storm in the atmosphere being lost upon him, "I believe you have a map of this part of the coast prepared by the Geodetic Survey."

It was a ridiculously matter-of-fact question to ask a woman trembling all over as she was with passion.

"Yes," she said, however, not knowing whether there was one or not.

"When you go," proceeded the old gentleman, tactfully, "I will step over to your house with you and borrow it."

Mrs. Gilpin, with a scarcely perceptible nod to her hostess, swept from the room. Mr. Still, thrusting his venerable straw hat down over his head until it rested firmly on his ears, trotted along amiably beside her. When she gave him

BLUE ANCHOR INN

the map he tucked it under his arm and disappeared down the sandy street.

"He wants it to play with," she confided irritably to her husband. "He will doubtless come back within an hour with a pin stuck in the exact spot where the yawl went down."

And, true to her prediction, he did return within the hour, but not with a pin stuck in the map. Instead he had traced a wobbly black line in pencil running from the island to the point where it seemed the sailboat must have been when the storm ceased and the wind fell. Then he showed that there was a current setting to eastward at this place—showed it marked plainly on the map—which must have carried the boat out from shore and away from the spot where every one had been looking for it, so that, supposing the boat still to be afloat, if its occupants were endeavoring to return over the same course they went, they would be carried to seaward and miss the island altogether.

Gilpin and Halsey listened with polite consideration, and then attempted to show him why this hypothesis was an impossible one, and how,

BLUE ANCHOR INN

had the yawl been afloat, it would have been discovered at this particular point at such a time or at that particular point at such another time ; but it was of no use, for the arguments he could not answer the old gentleman would not hear, and the ones he consented to hear he refuted so entirely to his own satisfaction—if not to any one else's—that he became more convinced than ever of the righteousness of his cause ; and therefore more urgent that they should take the motor boat straightway, go to the spot indicated on the map, and bring back the yawl. At last, exasperated beyond measure, and seeing that nothing would satisfy him except an actual visit to the spot, Gilpin said he could go out in the motor boat with Willy and convince himself as to whether the yawl was there or not. Whereupon Gilpin and Halsey, exhausted and hoarse, retired from the field of action, and sought quiet and repose.

“ But,” remonstrated Willy, when informed of the expedition, “ he’s a bug, Mr. Gilpin. The elevators don’t run to his top story no more.”

“ Well, he won’t hurt you.”

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"I wouldn't trust him, Mr. Gilpin. Them fellows always has carving knives stuck under their vests."

"If he gets violent step on his feet," suggested Gilpin on the spur of the moment. "That always fixes them."

With this thorough understanding of how to manage such a desperate character, Willy blithely set about getting ready for the trip. He was exceedingly dubious about spending several hours alone with the old gentleman, for above all things he loved to talk, and talking, with Mr. Still as audience, he conceived would be more of an exercise than a pastime. Therefore, when he saw Hester leaving the house after the completion of the few duties that fell to her lot after luncheon on the occasion of her afternoon out, he hailed her joyously.

"What ye goin' to do, kid?" he cried, when she approached the landing.

Hester went over the various possible things that might occupy her afternoon, and then with a fine recklessness vetoed them all.

"Nothing," she replied, blandly.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"You're elected. Step right aboard. Sight-seeing motor boat starts in a few moments."

"Oh, you silly."

She hesitated on the shore, with one finger dubiously resting on her under lip.

"I guess you're sort of thinkin' it over, ain't you?" demanded Willy presently, screwing the top on the gasoline tank.

"What would Mr. Gilpin say?"

"Listen, little one. Who do you think is the chauffeur of this ferry-boat? Mr. Gilpin is only the owner. I'm the boss. Do you get me?"

Hester giggled.

"Willy Holdefer," she exclaimed, bewildered. "*How* you talk!"

But still she did not come aboard. Willy stepped ashore with firmness in his eye. She backed away from him laughing, but he caught her and swung her up into his arms. She screamed, as a matter of course—then he set her down in the launch by the wheel. This is a primitive way of dealing with woman, but has been often found efficacious. Hester was far from showing resentment.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"I declare I wouldn't of thought you were *that* strong!" she observed.

"Strong!" cried Willy. "I can tie a lead pipe into a knot with one hand."

Hester was genuinely astonished.

"No!" she exclaimed.

Mr. Still came shuffling down the board walk at this juncture, and was stowed away in a safe corner with his map, field-glasses, note-book and stub of a pencil to amuse him. Willy started the machine, and they fared forth on their journey to salvage the yawl.

"He's so hard of hearin' he can't understand a word we say, can he?" demanded the girl.

Willy glanced at the old man thoughtfully.

"That's too much for yours truly, Hester," he replied. "Sometimes he's deaf, and sometimes he's on the job. But I dope it out like this, you understand:—hearin', to him, is woik, just like me and you doin' 'rithmetic; and if he ain't interested in the talk, he don't take the trouble to hear. But if he's interested, he starts all the machinery in his bean, and he makes it his *business* to listen."

They sailed directly east, at the direction of

BLUE ANCHOR INN

Mr. Still. The old man sat forward on the deck-house like an allegorical statue of Discovery, and scanned the empty horizon for a familiar sail. Hester and Willy sat in the stern-sheets warily watching the old man.

"Take it from me, little one," Willy observed presently; "he's clean bug, but every once in a while a real idea moves in and takes possession. Now this thought of his about the yawl listens good. He dopes it out that since the boat didn't go ashore, there's ten chances to one that she didn't sink in the ocean. Bone, as the French waiters say. If they didn't sink in the briny, and they're still alive, you understand, they're sailing right straight for the island, and not standing still."

"I do declare," said Hester.

"Now, my private opinion," went on Willy, "is that if it hadn't been for the current, which the old party discovered carrying her out to sea, the yawl ought to have come back to the island about to-night, but with the current carryin' her out she will pass twenty-five or thirty miles east of it."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

They continued on their course until dark, making about eight miles an hour in the rough sea. Then they saw the running lights of a boat to south of them. As they came nearer to it they saw in the moonlight that it was a yawl. The excitement aboard was at fever heat. The old gentleman changed from his far-seeing to his near-seeing glasses at least twenty times in one minute, referring first to the map and then to the sail in the distance.

"I told you," he cried, "I told you we should find them."

Willy eyed him warily.

"You're the Christopher Columbus," he said.

He let Hester steer while he went forward and signaled to the yawl, and after half an hour they came abreast of it and had the satisfaction of finding it really was Mr. Still's boat, with Brooke and Miss Grey aboard. But the situation when they got there seemed to be somewhat strained, for Brooke was steering, and Miss Grey sat in the bow.

CHAPTER XX

WILLY stood at the wheel of the launch. They were heading for the alternate red and white flash of the light on the spit south of Lugger Island. It was a very quiet party. On the one boat Brooke sat alone aft by the wheel and Miss Grey sat alone forward by the bowsprit. On the other, Mr. Still, his part of the work accomplished, slept the sleep of the just and righteous on the long cushioned seat ; Willy was full of the responsibility of sailing home ; and Hester, sitting beside him with her hands folded, was thinking of a number of things. Presently, a little preparatory wave of action ran through her, and she edged closer to the man at the wheel.

“Say, Willy,” she whispered, somewhat awe-struck at the idea, “do you think they’re in love?”

The skipper looked at her in astonishment.

“Who ‘r’ ye talkin’ about, little one?” he demanded.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

Hester looked at the two on the yawl and back again to Willy. Willy, thereupon, made an official survey for himself, as though he had never seen them before. Then he consulted his compass and brought the launch's head over a point or two.

"Too much for little Willy," he confided to her presently. "I can't keep hep to the doin's of all these people. All the dope seemed be pickin' Mr. Brooke for a winner wit. Mrs. Brooke—previous to this storm."

Hester nodded a sympathizing head.

"But what gets to me is," Willy went on, "what's this Mrs. Brooke doin' down here, anyway? There's somethin' phoney about that dame. She's a-playin' this game with an ace in her cuff, you take it from me. How do I know? Well, did you ever hear of her tellin' any one she was a widow? Or sayin' who her hubby was? No. And when you hear Mrs. Gilpin and Mr. Gilpin talkin', all they know is she's Mrs. Brooke. I tell you she's got a scheme."

"Is she an *adventuress*?" demanded Hester, thrilled.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

Willy laughed.

"You talk like Bertha the Sewing-Machine Girl," he commented. "No, she ain't no flim-flam artist. But, believe me, she's got the kibosh on Mr. Brooke for fair. One day I says to Mr. Brooke casual-like, when he was in the launch, 'Mr. Brooke,' I says (just as if the idea hadn't ever entered me head before), 'is Mrs. Brooke a relative of yours?' And Mr. Brooke he got red and says, 'Only be marriage,' he says, 'only be marriage.' And, say, I thought Mr. Gilpin would throw a duck-fit a-laughin'."

"Ain't folks silly s'mtimes?" commented Hester.

Willy peered anxiously into the binnacle.

"And let me tell you this," he observed presently. "I think I got the answer."

"No!" she cried, excitedly.

"Surest thing you know. I've been sitting tight and usin' me eyes and me ears. I've heard a thing or two, and I've seen a thing or two; and I've got it all doped out that Mrs. Brooke is Mr. Brooke's wife."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

Willy looked straight before him. Hester's eyes grew to be saucers. Then she gasped.

"You don't *tell* me!" she cried.

"Don't tell you? I'm a-shoutin' it in yer ear. Didn't I put you wise to the idea that they run that yawl in the mud a-purpose the first time they comes to the island? And didn't Mr. Brooke beat it the first peep he got at the dame an' have all his eats brought up to his room until he thought she'd cut loose and left? Well, I guess yes. And what's she hangin' round the island for now? 'Cause she's so tickled to death with it she can't let go? No! 'Nevaire,' as my friend Henri the waiter says. She's stayin' here because she's got the joker in her hand, and she's waitin' for the chance to slip it in."

Hester was bewildered.

"But," she asserted, in her bucolic simplicity, "if she was his wife, he'd live in her house instead of in Mr. Gilpin's."

Willy shook his head wisely.

"Not no more. Anything but that when they gets sick of each other. Marriages nowadays is like automobiles. You got to get your hooks on

BLUE ANCHOR INN

a new one every year ; most guys get in low spirits as soon as they're wise to the idea their wives is last year's models. So they get Renoed and renewed."

"What say ?" asked the girl, blankly.

"They buy a divorce and try again."

Hester's lips drew themselves into a tight line.

"I never did like that Mrs. Brooke. So there!" She delivered this opinion with the air of a Christian martyr who expected to be thrown to the lions for it instantly after.

"That makes two of us, kid."

"I'd rather see Mr. Brooke marry Miss Grey," went on Hester.

"Nothin' to it. He's froze to the cushion."

She meditated seriously for a long while.

"Mustn't it be awful not to be allowed to marry the one you want to marry?" she said, at length, in a burst of wisdom.

Willy leaned forward and carefully polished the glass of the binnacle with a piece of cotton-waste.

"Fierce!" he exclaimed, presently.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

The girl twined her handkerchief in and out between her fingers.

"Say, Hester."

"Um-huh!"

"Mr. Gilpin," he began, thoughtfully, "says he's got to have an automobile next winter—needs it in his business."

"Oh, my!" No especial interest.

"And I'm to be the chauffeur, understand? Now I sings a little song to meself like this—I says, Why don't Hester get on the job and be Mrs. Gilpin's maid?"

Her interest revived somewhat.

"I'd just love it. But ma and pa ——"

"Oh, forget *that*." His voice had an air of finality.

She held one corner of her handkerchief in her hand and pulled consciously at the other. She was a child of the people, and like an alert young animal, she recognized pursuit afar off.

Willy threw the wheel over three spokes.

"Hester," he said, leaning forward, "'jever think of gettin' married?"

She shook her head.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

Willy scratched his head, and frowned as if uncertain how to proceed. But an idea occurred to him.

"That is," he exclaimed, "not until now?"

She did not look up, but she reached over and gave him a little shy push with her hand.

A nudge to the wise is sufficient. Willy steered the boat with one hand.

"Say, kid," he whispered, "you're the only goil I ever loved."

It was the refrain of twenty cheap popular songs, but it was real music to her. She hid her flushed face in the shoulder of his flannel shirt. This might have gone on for a long while, had not Brooke called out from the yawl.

"Say, Willy," he cried, "are you trying to do the grape-vine twist with these boats?"

Hester sprang away. Willy looked ruefully astern at the atrocious wake he had left. Then he laughed sheepishly.

"Mr. Brooke," he said, "can you come aboard?"

The launch was lashed beside the yawl. Brooke jumped aboard.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Mr. Brooke," he stammered, in an agony of embarrassment, "Hester and me—we've fixed it up."

"Good," cried Brooke, and shook hands with them both. Hester, her face scarlet, could not raise her eyes from the deck. They were like two criminals discovered in their evil deeds. Brooke tried to cheer them up. And as he looked at them both, a great feeling of envy rose up in his heart.

"God bless you," he cried, "God bless you both."

He went quickly back to his place on the yawl.

CHAPTER XXI

WHEN the town clock (a brilliantly nickeled timepiece with an alarm attachment, which reposed on the cherry bureau in Captain John's room) pointed to two in the morning, the mayor of Luggar Island rose and made a survey of the stretch of sea shining before him in the moonlight. What he saw warranted executive action. Selecting at random several pieces of apparel most easily put on, he was presently in the main thoroughfare of the metropolis, excitedly summoning a special session of the town council.

The town council, in their turn, picking up those garments which came most easily to hand, swarmed out upon the streets. The wives, daughters, and the first cousin of the town council, realizing that on such a momentous occasion any formal dressing would be in bad taste, garbed themselves promptly in sundry convenient coverings and appeared in public with the celerity of city firemen. Seldom of late years

BLUE ANCHOR INN

had such a concourse of people crowded the streets of Lugger Island at such an hour of the night. In fact, it may have been the general belief up to that time that there was no such hour as two o'clock in the morning. Such was their regularity of habit that the island might well have been removed from its position at nine every evening and put on a shelf until five the next morning, and the space it occupied used for some other purpose. Therefore, to have the entire population awake and socially inclined at such a wicked and dissipated hour thrilled them through and through. The fact that Captain John's spouse, who was supposed to be the example of deportment for the city, had been able to find only one stocking (a state of affairs which would have shocked the community beyond recognition on any other occasion) was considered excessively funny just now. In fact, all barriers were down. With the possible exception of the time when Captain John had bought a derby hat to wear to a funeral, no such excitement as this had touched the town in ten years.

"The lanch is coming back," was the slogan

BLUE ANCHOR INN

that brought this seething crowd out on the streets. And sure enough there in the distance was the launch, towing a yawl.

The arrival and disembarking of the long-lost mariners and their rescuers was a time of keen excitement and embarrassment on all sides. It was embarrassing to Brooke and Miss Grey, because they were not used to such publicity and throngs of people. It was embarrassing to the mayor, because he felt he might be called upon to make a speech, tendering them the keys of the city. In reading books concerning mayors and the duties of mayors, he had discovered that they invariably presented people with the keys of the city; but as the only keys in his possession were the key to his dory and the key to his tool house—which were unfortunately in his other trousers anyway—the ceremony did not seem appropriate. He therefore did the simplest and most Jeffersonian thing. He stood on the shore and shook them by the hand as they landed, saying to each, "You done well, sir," regardless of sex.

This democratic ceremony finished every

BLUE ANCHOR INN

one hastened to shake hands with every one else and all heroes were permitted to retire to their beds. The great concourse of people were drunk with excitement. The sun was almost up when every one retired to bed again, and breakfasts that morning were hours late. But conversation during the day was more varied and entertaining than it had been for years. In fact, the townsfolk seemed to have actually taken an interest in being alive.

Things, however, gradually got down to the normal again, and affairs on the island returned to the same state they were before the disappearance of the yawl. Halsey renewed his attention to Miss Grey as though no interval at all had intervened. Captain John and Mr. Still made further depredations on the crabs residing in the channel. When not otherwise occupied, Willy and Hester took the engine on the launch apart and Willy thoroughly lubricated all its parts with oil and Albany grease. It was he alone who had stood between the town of Lugger Island and eternal and lasting fame. A reporter, an actual reporter from a real city paper, had made a visit

BLUE ANCHOR INN

to the island to write up the romantic rescue. He had been willing to print names and photographs of everybody concerned. It was the chance of a lifetime. He wanted to publish portraits of Miss Grey and Brooke and the mayor of the town with a pen-and-ink picture of a ship in the background weathering a heavy storm, and head it, "Society Woman Blown to Sea." But Willy had forestalled him. He had occupied the landing with a boat-hook and fended off the reporter's rowboat when he attempted to come ashore. The explanation of the glorious publicity contemplated had fallen on deaf ears. Attempts to extricate information had been worse than futile.

The reporter had at last begun to suspect that the information he was getting from Willy was more or less extemporaneous, so he presently departed; and Lugger Island lost its opportunity to be immortalized in print, for the picture the paper published in its story of the episode, with the legend under it, "Cross marks spot where yacht went adrift," was not of Lugger Island at all, but was taken miles down the coast.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

After having thus missed fame by a small margin, the island, as has been said, settled down to the even tenor of its ways. And Brooke, seeing every one else doing the things they had been doing a week before, went to see Mrs. Brooke.

He discovered her on the beach, her immaculate attire protected from the sands by a steamer rug, and her dainty complexion protected from the sun by a pink parasol. She wore a hat—a hat of cascades of white laciness—do they call it a *lingerie* hat? Her dress was starched and modeled and ironed till its folds fell and hung with the careless precision of a picture. Around its hem were hemstitching and feather-stitching, and briar-stitching (if there is such a thing) and every other variety of stitching known to the civilized world, until she was almost a compendium of needlework. The zenith of neatness and trimness to which she had attained had always been an annoyance to him. If ordinary cleanliness were next to godliness, her kind of cleanliness would have taken her into heaven at a bound. It made

BLUE ANCHOR INN

her inapproachable, as if he were conversing with an exhibition of mere sartorial correctness rather than with a live, breathing person.

"How does it feel," she said, "to be a shipwrecked mariner?"

He thought a moment, wondering if any one really could give a sane answer to a question of that sort.

"Why," he ventured, "I'm sure I'm glad it's over."

"You had very good company, too!"

She said this with an attempt at archness.

"Miss Grey?"

She nodded.

"Do you like her?"

"Yes," he replied. "Don't you?"

"Oh," she said, "I'm a woman."

"That's a non-committal reply."

"Oh, no. But the woman who is liked by men only as much as by other women isn't very attractive."

"Then you don't think women like each other?" he asked thoughtfully.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Of course they do. But men demand fascination."

He appeared doubtful.

"Haven't you found it so?"

"Oh, I don't know. To me a woman is like a picture puzzle with several pieces missing."

"Didn't Miss Grey fascinate you?"

He looked at her quickly, wondering why she came back to that subject.

"Oh, no," he replied. "Not so bad as that."

She looked straight before her at the sea. There was a pause. It appeared that he had offended her.

At last he said:

"Have you enjoyed your visit at Lugger Island?"

"Oh, yes."

"It was a strange accident that brought you here."

"Yes," she replied shortly.

Brooke was surprised at her manner. Something had piqued her. But what could it be? He went over their conversation in his mind. He was no judge of women, but a friend of his,

BLUE ANCHOR INN

who knew all about them, had once given him seven axioms, which was the sum of all human wisdom concerning the sex. Or at least he said so. Brooke had forgotten all but one, and that was, "If a woman asks a man about another woman, she is not concerned about the man at all, or is concerned about that woman a great deal."

He was worried. She had to be concerned about him because she was his wife. She was concerned about the other woman, of course. Wives were always concerned about the twenty-three million other women in the world. He had heard it said frequently. And, as he looked at her, realizing that she was his wife and for all time would be his wife, it brought him up with a round turn. He did not love her. She meant no more to him than any piece of property toward which he had certain responsibilities and duties. But the net was around him and there was no escape. He belonged to her. He shrugged his shoulders, and, like a dutiful husband, proceeded to attempt to alleviate the situation.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"What made you think," he said, "that Miss Grey would have fascinations for a man?"

She seemed to be glad to get back to this topic.

"Oh," she replied, "three days alone with any woman, and the stoutest heart is gone."

He saw an opening.

"Suppose then it had been you instead of Miss Grey."

She shot forward her chin and set her teeth tightly.

"We will not discuss me," she said sharply.

He would have admitted then he did not understand women. Also it seemed apparent that he was not very congenial with his wife.

"You seem annoyed at the idea?"

"I am."

"Then we won't discuss it."

"I'm very glad."

He saw that his effort to mollify her had either not been appreciated or had been too easily seen through. So he determined to defer further conversation until another time. He rose to leave her.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"I am sorry we quarrel so soon," he said.
"It is a very bad beginning."

"A bad beginning of what?" she replied,
with no effort to understand.

But he simply nodded and went away.

CHAPTER XXII

THEY were at the lunch table at Gilpin's. Halsey, beaming like a contented owl, arrived just in time to have himself included in the grace Gilpin muttered before the meal.

"Dita made the remark ——" he began, presently.

"Who's Dita?" interrupted Gilpin, blandly.

"Neddy! Don't be so obtuse," his wife inserted.

Gilpin's humor expanded.

"Oh, yes, yes," he exclaimed, comprehendingly. "Go on with your story. You said: 'Ditto made the remark ——'"

"Dita," corrected the other, embarrassed.

"All right. Only what did she say?"

"Now, Neddy, don't embarrass him. Can't you see he is in love?"

Halsey turned pink.

"This is a painful subject, I'm sure," he observed. "What I was about to remark was that

BLUE ANCHOR INN

Miss Grey said she would like to live on this island all the time."

The head of the house and his wife exchanged knowing glances.

"Did you follow up that lead?" observed the latter.

Halsey, who never quite understood banter of this sort, took refuge in silence.

"Mrs. Gilpin caught me on one of those soft-pedal ideas," said Gilpin, blandly.

"Oh, Neddy, I didn't."

Her husband grinned seraphically.

"Well," he conceded, "perhaps it was some other girl."

Mrs. Gilpin maintained her dignity.

"Well," she said, turning to Halsey and ignoring completely the monster who was her husband, "I am sure you would make her a fine husband."

Brooke looked intently at the man opposite him. What was there about him to make a good husband? He said to himself: "How can any woman ever love a man with a perpetual little pimple on the side of his nose?" He was surprised that he had never noticed before what

BLUE ANCHOR INN

an unprepossessing person Halsey was. He was eccentric. That was the word for it. Nobody but an eccentric person would have worn a purple tie with tiny yellow spots on it. Could any woman be happy with a man who wore a purple tie with yellow spots on it? To come right down to brass tacks, how could any woman get romance out of loving a man who wore eye-glasses? It was inconceivable.

"Well, Roger," cried Gilpin, "stop looking at Halsey and tell us whether you think he would not make a fine husband."

Brooke roused himself suddenly.

"Would he make her a good husband?"

"Yes. You have seen something of her. You ought to know."

"Yes," Brooke found himself saying, "I ought to know. Halsey has a great deal to live up to. The person who is a fine husband for her must be fine all through to the very heart of him. For she is wonderful. She is all gold. The man who is her husband will have to do his best, if he wants to deserve her—and even then he may not succeed."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"You see," said Halsey, "even if I aspired to the honor of being her husband, Roger doubts if I should be worthy."

Mrs. Gilpin looked at Brooke wonderingly.

"You talk almost as if you loved her yourself."

The young man laughed.

"Why," he said, "I'm married."

Which statement was accurate and unanswerable.

Brooke gave the subject of Halsey's conjugal qualifications further thought in the afternoon as he strolled up the beach. But he arrived at no conclusion. He saw nothing humorous in the fact that he had up to this time considered his fellow guest as a highly entertaining and uplifting person. He was astonished that he had not been able to see the man's character more clearly before. It was not until now he realized his impreciseness, his unoriginality, his utter colorlessness, his lack of all the sterling qualities that are necessary for a husband and a man. It did not seem strange to him that he had known Halsey intimately for about ten years and had never

BLUE ANCHOR INN

suspected the existence of all these criminal deficiencies in him. But then Brooke was just a little warped in his judgment. There was something the matter with him.

His ruminations on this subject were presently interrupted by some one in the distance shouting his name. He faced about and discovered Damon and Pythias, in the persons of Captain John and Mr. Still, hastening wildly toward him, with antics and gesticulations giving the idea of running like two men in a moving picture drama. The young man sat down to wait for them, and in due time they arrived.

"Where's the fire?" asked Brooke.

"Eh?" demanded Still, breathlessly.

Captain John glanced at him malevolently.

"Nothin' th' matter, Mr. Brooke. He just hed t' run and tell you an idee before he spilled it."

The old gentleman was sitting on the sand, gasping like a newly-caught fish.

"I bet you he's forgot it already," observed the captain, with something like pride in his associate's abilities.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

But Mr. Still gave a final gasp and emerged from the piscatory kingdom.

"John and I," he said, in a high voice, "have been having a discussion."

"He did the 'dis' and I did th' cussin'," interpolated the mayor, with the air of one propounding a jest.

Mr. Still looked at him with unseeing eyes.

"It wasn't so much of a discussion either. Poor old John's brain has a flat wheel, and he can't get up much speed with it."

The mayor writhed with offended dignity.

"Get rid of th' idea quick," he grumbled, "before it oozes out of th' pores of your skin."

"Well, Mr. Brooke," went on the old man, "the thing I said to our genial friend was that I liked this island."

"I don't see how you could get up much of a discussion on that."

"Well, I went further. I said I'd like to live on the island. I said I'd like to spend the rest of my days on the island."

"Nobody but a soft-head like him," put in the captain, "could ever get an idee like that in him."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

What he ought to do is t' buy a berth in an old man's home where they have plush sofys and white waiters and a elevator to take you up t' your room. Why, look at me. I've lived here all my life, and all I want t' do is t' get away."

"I'm an old, old man," said Mr. Still, beginning to speak in the middle of the mayor's discourse. "My course of life is nearing its close. All my days have been spent amidst the noise of the city and of the city people making money. It has been my dream since I was a boy some day to live near the noise of salt water, where I could be quiet and think—where I could see the ships on the sea."

Brooke was profoundly touched.

"I am sure, Mr. Still, it could be arranged for you to do so," he said.

"What I should want would be a house up there where those trees are." He pointed to a couple of oak trees growing on a little rise of ground. "A house with a great fireplace in it."

"That jest shows how practical he is,"

BLUE ANCHOR INN

grumbled Captain John. "There ain't no heat in a fireplace. What he wants is a nice sheet-ir'n stove."

"Well, Mr. Still, why don't you do it?"

"Mr. Brooke," said the old man, "I want to buy the island."

Brooke started.

"See," observed the mayor. "Needs a new topmast."

"Why, Mr. Still," said the young man, with the air of one reasoning with a child, "the island is two miles long and a quarter of a mile wide."

Out came the little note-book, and the old gentleman carefully jotted down the figures.

"Why don't you buy simply a small lot,—say an acre?"

He shook his head.

"No. I want the whole thing. I don't want any one else to come and change it."

The young man looked troubled.

"See. All gone. Rotted away," said Captain John.

"Keep quiet," remarked Brooke, roughly.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"What I want to know from you," babbled on the old man, "is the value of this land."

Brooke smiled rather grimly. It had had practically no value for the last ten years.

"What would you think?" he said.

"A hundred dollars an acre?"

"Perhaps."

"Will you undertake to purchase it for me at that price?"

Brooke looked at him uncertainly, wondering what was the best way to deal with him.

"I think," he replied, "you had better see them yourself."

The old man shook his head vehemently.

"No, no," he said. "They would argue with me. If I told them a hundred they would think I meant a hundred and fifty. I am too old for that. Tell them a hundred. That's what I've decided I can pay for it. If it is too little, no one is harmed. If it is too much, so much the better for them."

Brooke looked at the kindly old gentleman, his glasses supported on the apex of his nose, his venerable straw hat thrust back on his bald pate,

BLUE ANCHOR INN

and his benevolent eyes shining with childish enthusiasm. A wave of pity swept over him. He could not encourage such lunacy.

"Perhaps," he said, gently, "if we wait a while ——"

"That's right," cried Still, "no use to wait. No use to wait."

Brooke filled his lungs.

"I say," he shouted, "let's give it consideration. Let's think it over."

The old gentleman nodded vigorously and approvingly.

"My idea exactly. Find out what they think about it. If it's too little, no harm done. If it's too much, why, so much the better for them, you see."

Brooke sighed.

"You could not expect them," he replied with unflagging patience, "to sell the house they live in."

"Let them keep it. And an acre of ground. I'll take the rest."

The young man gave it up. He could think of no other excuse.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"The best way to treat 'em when they get like that," observed Captain John, wisely, "is t' humor 'em. If you oppose him he'll have 'n atheletic fit."

"Quiet, quiet," cried Brooke, irritated by the captain's volubility.

Mr. Still smiled benignly.

"When will you go?" he observed.

"Oh, now," said the other. "Now. Come along."

He rose to his feet.

"But," he continued, hoping to confuse the old man with practical details, "you must have money, a deposit—cash. Perhaps we should wait for that."

Mr. Still fumbled through all the pockets of his attire. His two companions eyed him in breathless suspense, wondering what new phase of his insanity he was going to reveal next. He first removed his far-seeing glasses, as he usually did in moments of excitement, and adjusted his others with clumsy eagerness.

"How many acres on the island?" he stopped to ask, irrelevantly.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Three hundred and sixty. Three hundred and eighty, maybe," Brooke informed him, impatiently.

"I thought it was more. But no matter. No matter."

He presently unearthed from some improbable cache a decrepit pocketbook, which he ungirdled and spread out on the sand. From the midst of its heterogeneous cargo of iron washers, street-car transfers, receipted bills, fish-hooks and money rumped almost beyond recognition, he at length extracted a dirty, dog-eared piece of folded paper, and passed it over to the young man.

"If they agree, give them this," he said, vaguely. "No deposits for me. I'm too old—too old for delays. Let's get it over with one way or the other."

Brooke took the paper and opened it with fumbling fingers, and having done so, sat staring at it.

"Humor him," counseled Captain John. "Humor him."

Brooke, however, did not reply to this

BLUE ANCHOR INN

observation, for what he held was a properly certified check for forty thousand dollars.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHEN Brooke, laden with his wealth, arrived at the Blue Anchor Inn, he did not waste time on idle small talk. He found them all sitting on the porch awaiting dinner.

"Ned," he said, sitting on the porch rail, "would you like to sell the island?"

"Um-huh," said Ned, deep in the sporting page of his paper.

"The whole of it?" persisted Brooke.

"Quiet, Roger. Quiet. I'm too old for fairy-tales."

"What makes you ask?" demanded Mrs. Ned, pleasantly.

"Because I have been thinking it might be arranged."

Gilpin favored his guest with a sardonic smile.

"What do you think it is worth an acre?" pursued the guest.

The other put down his paper.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Well, just as a matter of mental relaxation," said he, "seventy-five dollars."

"Can you get that?"

"No."

"We tried once," said his wife.

"Oh, yes, we tried. There was a real estate whirlwind named Smithers, who tried to pull off the deal. He was willing to pay the price—about twenty-nine thousand dollars in all, but when he saw the wreck of the old trestle, it was all off."

"The old island is too inaccessible," said Mrs. Gilpin.

"Should you like to build a concrete trestle?" Brooke asked.

"No, Roger, no. I shouldn't risk a cent on it."

The other hesitated a moment.

"If you were offered forty thousand for the whole of it, exclusive of this house," he said, "would you consider it?"

Gilpin picked up his paper.

"No," he replied.

"Why, Ned!" cried his wife.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"No," exclaimed Ned, putting down the sheet, "I wouldn't stop to consider it. I'd catch the man by the throat and shake the money out of his clothes before he had time to change his mind."

Brooke threw the check in his host's lap.

"Consider it shaken out," he observed.

Gilpin picked up the piece of paper gingerly. He glanced at it hastily, and then, with the air of a man not quite sure of his faculties, read it carefully through from number to signature. His wife and Halsey, overpowered by curiosity, arose from their chairs and stared at the incomprehensible thing over his shoulder. Nothing was heard on the porch but the busy drilling of a wasp in the rafter overhead. Gilpin's face hardened.

"What is it?" he demanded at last. "A joke?"

Brooke assured him it was not, and went on to relate the story of the offer.

"Go get him quick," counseled Halsey. "He is an old man. He may die."

But Gilpin hesitated.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"I don't want to take advantage of an insane person."

"I have been thinking that, too," said Mrs. Gilpin. "It seems to me, Roger, you had better tell the story of this offer to your—to Mrs. Brooke, and ask her what she thinks we should do."

For some reason or other, Brooke did not relish this idea, but he nevertheless acquiesced. Immediately after dinner he set out on his mission.

"And if she says it is all right," admonished the prospective vendor of the island, "bring the old man back with you—dead or alive."

Mrs. Brooke was alone on the front porch of her cottage. Preliminary formalities being disposed of, he stated his mission.

"You say he offered forty thousand dollars?" she asked.

"Yes. What would you advise?"

"Take it," she said.

"But is he in his—his right mind?"

"I think so," a little stiffly.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

“ I didn’t want to take advantage of an old man.”

She smiled.

“ Have no fears on that score. But be very careful he doesn’t take advantage of you.”

Brooke laughed at this quaint conceit.

“ Very well,” he replied, “ we shall be quite careful.”

The old gentleman trotted along beside him back to the Blue Anchor Inn.

Gilpin and Halsey, being lawyers, had drawn up the deed before the two arrived. There was no thought of delay on an occasion like this. In fact, every one felt a little trepidation lest some hitch might develop.

Mr. Still adjusted his glasses with care, and seizing the document sat down—evil omen—in the chair on which reposed the ancestral straw hat. But such was the tension of the moment, they forebore to call his attention to it. After about five minutes of oppressive silence, while he read the deed, apparently with the end of his bony forefinger, he said :

“ Give me the pen.”

BLUE ANCHOR INN

And he signed with a shaky hand—"Samuel Still."

In the morning, immediately after breakfast, the Gilpins, accompanied by Brooke (Halsey being otherwise occupied), repaired to a little hill, from which could be seen the entire island, the Gilpins to see if they repented of the bargain, Brooke for no reason at all. And the Gilpins, after close scrutiny, decided that they did not repent of their bargain.

"I suppose, Roger, you will live here now."

"I?"

"Where did you think you were going to live? This is all part of a gigantic scheme to ensnare you. And the crowning touch of humor was to have you manage the deal yourself, wasn't it?"

"I don't see how it affects me," observed Brooke.

"Well, she has shown you that she is a good housekeeper, and a fine dresser. Now she has proved she can give you a home."

Brooke laughed in spite of himself.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Let's talk of something pleasant," he said, however.

The lady looked at him keenly.

"Are you going back, my dear?" asked her husband.

"Presently," she replied, and seated herself beneath the tree.

Her husband descended the hill.

"Now, Roger Brooke," said she, "what is the trouble between you and your wife?"

"We are very uncongenial," he began.

"Ned says all wives and husbands are uncongenial."

"Oh, but this is deep. The sort of uncongeniality that might exist between an angora cat and a porcupine. I should be throwing things at her in a week."

"You have made up your mind then not to—eat from the hand."

"How can I make up my mind about anything? I am all in the dark."

He thought a moment.

"Of course I've made up my mind," he said, suddenly. "I made it up the instant I first saw

BLUE ANCHOR INN

her. She's not of my world. She's too showy. The channel of her mind is dress. I want humanity, not artificiality. I want a mind, not a mental machine. You must understand the distinction that exists between her and yourself, for instance. In other words," he said, with a smile, "I fear I did not choose wisely."

She pondered a long while.

"Well," she said, finally, "we must find a way."

But that remark does not always settle vexed questions.

When she had gone, he wandered down toward the channel, where a little cat-boat lay. It was then that he saw Dita Grey for the first time since the night they returned in the yawl. He had wanted to see her. He had made several efforts to see her. But the relations between him and Mrs. Brooke being strained by their conversation concerning her, he could not well ask for her at Mrs. Brooke's house. And at other times the girl adroitly avoided him. When he remembered his last act in her presence, he saw the reason for it. He could not

BLUE ANCHOR INN

apologize in words for an act like that. But he could show her by his actions—if she would let him—that it had been the result of a misguided impulse, and that in his heart he had had no shred of disrespect for her. This was necessary for his peace of mind. Heretofore, he had never had to make excuses to any one for his bearing toward the whole female phalanx. It had been as cool and deferential as toward the statues in the park. Imagine the incredulity of his senses, the astonishment of his whole moral system, when he had reached forward and held one of those untouchable creatures in his hands. Certainly it disrupted his peace of mind.

As for the girl, who could tell what her thoughts were?

But as she approached him, she nodded to him with a faint smile, and would have passed on without a word. But he stood almost in her path.

"Dita," he said, "may I have a word with you?"

She stopped.

"Yes," she replied, coolly.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

He hesitated. He did not know what that word should be. She was looking at him narrowly.

"Will you go sailing with me?"

"I'm busy to-day," she replied, promptly. But there was the slightest pause before she said "to-day," as though she might have added it as an afterthought. He did not perceive it.

"I'm sorry."

He paused.

"Are you angry with me?"

"No," with no intonation.

"Nothing has displeased you?"

Pride prevented her entering into a discussion by answering in the affirmative. Whereas "no" would have conveyed the idea that the evening in question had been a period of enjoyment.

"I'm sorry for anything that has occurred," he said, while she hesitated.

"You may well be."

Whereupon, without other words, she walked quickly away. He looked after her for a moment and then went on down to the water. But she had not gone a hundred yards before she turned

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"I'M BUSY TO-DAY"



BLUE ANCHOR INN

suddenly. When she did not see him, she called his name. Her voice echoed against the empty walls. She ran down the sandy street. But he had already disappeared behind the tumble-down houses.

CHAPTER XXIV

WILLY glanced at the gentleman who was being propelled across the channel in a rowboat.

"Here comes something," he confided to Hester, "that don't look good even when it's far away."

What Hester saw was a gentleman tastefully attired in the height of fashion. His brilliant white vest, to which the daintiest hint of color was given by circles of crimson about the size of quarter dollars, shone brightly across the water like a compound sunset. His necktie was composed of horizontal layers of chocolate, pistachio and orange ice. He wore a black ribbon to his tortoise shell eye-glasses, and his patent leather shoes sparkled like the trappings of a coach-horse. This refulgent being was a thing of beauty and a joy forever in the eyes of the girl, but Willy's delight was somewhat tempered and restrained.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Guaranteed-forever hose?" he inquired solicitously as this vision of loveliness stepped out on the dock.

To this somewhat cryptic remark the vision replied nothing.

"Which is Mr. Gilpin's house, my boy?" he asked with a certain aloofness.

Willy shaded his eyes from the glare of the vest.

"See all those houses over there?" he asked, pointing toward the center of the island.

"Yes."

"All those are his."

Whereupon the young man fell to polishing the brass running lights of the launch. The stranger grew red and fingered his watch fob uncertainly.

"Which house does he live in?" he demanded, severely.

Willy looked up as if he were surprised the man had not left long ago.

"Right over there," he said obligingly.

The man started in the direction indicated.

"Did you want to see Mr. Gilpin himself?"

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"I did."

Willy glanced down the street.

"Looks as if he is gonna be in our midst in a few minutes," said he, indicating a figure sauntering toward them.

"I'll go meet him," replied the man, and departed.

The stranger approached Mr. Gilpin with outstretched hand.

"Mr. Gilpin!" he cried gladly.

The other looked at him with speculative indifference.

"I've seen you somewhere before."

"It's Smithers," exclaimed the newcomer, coming to the rescue, "Smithers."

This information failed to awaken any spark of recognition in Gilpin.

"Oh, yes, Smithers. How are you, Smithers?" he said.

One felt almost as if he were insulting the man when one called him by his right name. Smithers assured him he was well.

"I came to see you about the property, Mr. Gilpin," he went on.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Oh, yes. About the property. Would you mind standing a little bit sidewise, Smithers? I've been having trouble with my eyes."

The other buttoned up his coat with a pained air.

"About the island here," he continued. "You remember about a year ago you offered it to me for seventy-five an acre."

"Yes."

"Well, I'm ready to buy it at that price."

He made a gesture as of one conferring eternal good fortune on his fellow man.

"Too late, Smithers. Sold it yesterday."

The agent's jaw dropped.

"To whom?"

"A man named Still."

The other's face expressed disgust.

"Stung again," he muttered.

"What's the matter with you real estate agents?" inquired Gilpin. "You blow first hot and then cold."

Smithers grew confidential.

"I'll explain the situation," he said, lowering his voice, although there was no one within a

BLUE ANCHOR INN

quarter of a mile. "There has been a remarkable boom in seashore property, and every one is wild to get control of a block of undeveloped coast. I found out yesterday that Still was down here, and I smelled a rat, sir, I smelled a rat at once."

"Do you know Mr. Still?" inquired Gilpin, puzzled.

"Not personally, but by reputation. He is the cleverest real estate agent we have."

The other smiled. The idea of old Mr. Still as a clever real estate agent was funny.

"You're thinking of the wrong man, I guess. But I understood you to say that the inaccessibility of the island was an unsurmountable objection."

The agent smiled importantly.

"There are new developments. If Still made up his mind to get the property, he would get it at any price. Our idea was to get control of it and make him buy from us at an advance. Any way, you know, to turn an honest penny. He knew what he had to expect. That's the reason he's been so quiet."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

Gilpin laughed aloud.

"Smithers," he said, "the amount of misinformation you get together is astounding, simply astounding."

He escorted the visitor to his boat, and hurried back to the house to tell his wife and guests the humorous story that old Mr. Still was the cleverest real estate agent in the business, which tale of mistaken identity caused no little amusement.

Prior to his arrival Brooke had been wasting his powers of persuasion in an effort to arouse either Mrs. Gilpin or Halsey to such a state of semi-activity that they would consent to sail with him in the cat-boat. But Halsey was enmeshed in the snares of a book on the single tax which bid fair to keep him in a trance for the rest of the day, and his hostess, whose intention had been to do some fancy cross-stitching on stockings, was in the midst of a nerve-racking picture puzzle. Brooke turned to Gilpin, but that gentleman proposed to beguile the hours by painting the fence around his vegetable garden, and also refused.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"You are like the wedding guests in the Bible," said Brooke, in despair, and went on his expedition alone.

It was one of those clear blue skies over which moved leisurely white shaving-soap clouds. The blue sky met the blue sea in a crisp line. A brisk, energetic breeze swept in from the water, bending over the tops of the trees and keeping the leaves all aflutter. It was like a fine man's day in October, such as gives the actively inclined person an opportunity to speak contemptuously of others of the human race who prefer summer novels, picture puzzles, and dissipations like painting the garden fence, to the muscle giving exercise of sitting in a sailboat while the wind blows you somewhere you have no especial desire to go.

Brooke surveyed the sky and the sea with absolute approval. The ozone in the air filled his lungs and he went whistling along like a school-boy, perfectly happy to be out in the open. And when he arrived at the landing where the cat-boat was moored, there was Dita Grey sitting in the boat.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Dear me," she said, "I thought you were never coming."

He stared. He had not known he was expected.

"Well," he said, suavely, "I was a little delayed."

Whereupon, without another word, he ran up the sail, cast off and took his seat by the tiller as though he had been planning this party for some time. She smiled. If he had known the turmoil that upset her young mind since he had seen her the day before, he would not have been surprised, perhaps, that she was waiting there at the slip.

Indeed it might be that a more reserved, a more self-conscious and less impulsive person would not have come at all. Such a course might have been more advisable and less fraught with embarrassment, but it would not have satisfied her. The day before it had pleased her to view him from a pedestal when he gave her that opportunity. She had made an elaborate show of resentment for an act of his for which he had been only half guilty. At the time, there was

BLUE ANCHOR INN

nothing for her to do but repudiate it, for had she tacitly acquiesced by showing absolutely no disapproval she would have created an impossible situation. It would have been a simple invitation for a repetition of the performance. Thus far her action had been proper, but when he apologized she should not have further humiliated him.

It was not until he had left her that the full significance of what she had done struck her like a blow. She ran after him with the vague idea of wiping that mark off her score, but he had gone. Of course it made no difference what he thought of her (she made this perfectly clear to herself) but it was necessary, when she had done an unchivalrous thing, to undo it at the first opportunity. But would he now give her that opportunity? Had she not rebuffed him more than his pride would stand?

She had considered this question through the night when she should have been sleeping; and in the morning had decided that if the mountain would not come to Mahomet, she would go to

BLUE ANCHOR INN

the mountain. Hence her presence at the landing, in the hope (she winced when she thought how she had abased herself) that he would come there also.

"Will you accept my apology of yesterday?" he said presently.

"I think," she replied, "I must have accepted it at the time."

"You conceal your thoughts very well, then," he replied.

She pulled a large red flower from the knot of her hair.

"I brought this to give you so you wouldn't scold me," she said, meekly.

Whereupon she pinned it to his shirt.

"I think it was more appropriate where it was before," he said, looking from the bright flower to her rich, brown hair.

"Oh, no," she pleaded.

"Let's put it back. You are much more becoming to it."

"But," said she, "if you don't accept my gift, then I shall know you are angry with me."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"But what on earth have I to be angry about?"

She pretended to think a while.

"Aren't you angry?"

"With you?"

She nodded vigorously.

"How the world turns about," he said by way of reply. "Yesterday my spirit is torn to shreds because I think a certain girl is angry with me—to-day that same girl brings rich gifts to me not to be angry with her."

She smiled.

"And to-morrow ——" he went on.

She was nothing if not unexpected. She dropped on her knees to put two fingers on his lips.

"You were just about to say to-morrow I should be angry with you again."

He did not deny it.

"And then you were going to make some remark about the changeability of woman," she cried, holding up a finger at him.

"The changeability of woman," he said,

BLUE ANCHOR INN

thoughtfully. "Oh, that's really their greatest charm. Please don't hold up your accusing finger at me."

"That's the thing that finds out everything that is in you," she explained. "It frightens you so you cannot dissemble the thoughts of your wicked heart."

He caught the finger.

"Let's curtail its powers, then. I don't want it to find out the things that are in my wicked heart."

She moved a little nearer, and put her elbows audaciously on his knees.

"Do you suppose I need that?" she said, indicating the finger in his hand.

He looked at her fairly.

"What you know," he said steadily, "I shall not deny."

"You would not?" she replied, gently.

She was very alluring, and very near. Her handsome eyes changed with every idea that revolved behind them. There were two spots of high color in her cheeks. She was so close that sometimes the blowing strands of her hair

BLUE ANCHOR INN

touched him. He held the tiller very tight, with both hands.

"I must say something very discourteous," he said in a low tone.

She looked at him wonderingly.

"Would you mind sitting over there?"

She did not move.

"You send me away?"

"Yes."

"Then you must give me my flower."

"No," he asserted, firmly, "I will not give it to you."

She broke into smiles.

"I will not go without my flower."

"I intend to keep it."

"Why do you send me away?" she demanded, wondering.

"Because," he said, "I am afraid I shall touch you."

The little boat, untended now, was running far out of her course in a fine exhibition of landsman's seamanship.

"Touch me?" she repeated.

"Yes," he cried fiercely, "because I am afraid

BLUE ANCHOR INN

I shall take you up in my arms like this," and he crushed her to him, "and tell you I love you, I love you, I love you!"

She lay quiet in his arms with her head on his shoulder.

"And," he added, "may God help us."

CHAPTER XXV

BROOKE walked back to the Blue Anchor Inn with a singular lightness of step. The sky was clearer and more deeply blue than in the morning. The great handfuls of fleecy clouds were more fleecily white. The whole world became unaccountably more personal, more sympathetic, more a thing to be held in the hand as a personal belonging. His mind took a larger and more optimistic view of the extent of the universe. It was something outside and beyond, which did not matter. The ground which his own feet trod was all the world, and that world was happy, glorious, Elysian. There might be a hundred million people beyond, planning, plotting, with sciled hands and selfish hearts ; but no thought of them, no remembrance of unhappiness, strife, discouragement—reality itself—broke through the rainbow bubble in which he walked. The rose glasses of a man's

BLUE ANCHOR INN

love! Oh, what view is more wonderful, more glorious, more evanescent, more ethereal—and what else, save only God's rainbows, is so forever-returning!

As he walked along the unpeopled street, he met Willy. He felt in the depths of his pockets, and drawing forth what wealth was there, counted it hurriedly. He stopped the man-of-all-work as he was about to pass.

"Willy," he demanded, "did I ever give you a dollar and sixty-five cents?"

"No," replied Willy.

"Well," he cried brightly, "there is no time like the present to begin." And he poured the loose silver into the boy's hands, much to the latter's astonishment.

Mrs. Gilpin saw the sunshine in his eyes, and it started a little eddy of conjecture in her mind. Halsey even took time enough from the business of unraveling the solid stuff in his hands to remark that "that foggy grouch seems to have disappeared." When he went into his bedroom, he found Gilpin there before him sitting on the window sill fondling Brooke's automatic pistol,

BLUE ANCHOR INN

his favorite and most valued possession, which he had admired for months on end in the shop, and had purchased at length with his first twenty dollars.

"Excuse me for invading your sanctum," said the host, "but I had to come and look at this again."

The other looked at his possession fondly.

"Isn't it a wonder?" he cried, with enthusiasm.

"I'm crazy about it."

"You really like it?"

"Really like it! I'm going to buy one!"

Brooke picked up his hair brushes.

"Ned," he said, "I want to make you a present of that gun."

The man on the window sill started.

"Huh?" he said.

"I want to give it to you."

The other put down the pistol and started across the room. Brooke caught him at the door and held him.

"What's the matter?"

His companion laughed.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"I haven't time to stay here and listen to you talk rag-time, Roger, old boy."

The other grew serious.

"Here, take it," he said, picking up the pistol, "and don't be foolish. I have been wanting to give you something you would like. This is my first opportunity."

And he thrust it upon his host with such evident earnestness that Ned Gilpin took him at his word and kept the pistol.

Ned Gilpin's wife was a very wise young woman. Her searching glance did not overlook the fact that something unusual had happened in Roger Brooke's career. There was no mistaking his exalted humor. There was no denying his flagrant optimism. This thing was not an incident, a bare occurrence, a mere pleasant taste in the mouth. It was a turning about, a reversal, a crisis, a phenomenon. And it did not take so much as her woman's intuition to know what the phenomenon was.

Had she divined such a phenomenon in the life of any other man, she would have waited, but, added to the contorted and doubtful cir-

BLUE ANCHOR INN

cumstances already complicating this particular young man's biography, it appeared to demand further diagnosis and prescription. She therefore made an opportunity presently for seeing him alone.

"Now," she said, with unusual abruptness, "what's the matter?"

"There is a woman," he answered, "in my life. I shouldn't have said woman, either. Perhaps ——"

"I know," she supplied, "angel. When did this happen?"

"This morning."

"Not your wife?" she asked.

The faintest suspicion of a cloud passed over his face. He shook his head.

"Miss Grey, then. Or do you call her Dita?"

"I call her Dita."

She twisted the rings on her fingers.

"You poor boy!" she said, at length.

"I know," he answered, "but I can't think of it that way yet."

"You must," she said.

He looked thoughtfully at the same blue sky,

BLUE ANCHOR INN

and the same clear air, and the same world around that had seemed so felicitous to him a while ago, and even now, perhaps, the illusion was fading.

"What a fool I was a year ago," he said at length. "But how could I have known? My freedom had never then been of value to me, and now when I haven't it——" He made a gesture.

"That seems to be," she said gently, "the scheme of our lives."

"I understand," he replied. "A man gains strength only by going up-hill."

He thought a while.

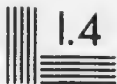
"A man can chasten himself to the end of time," he went on presently, "and not be bitter, but when that means driving some one else along the same road, it's hard. How can I stand that? How can I do it at all? I've known that I loved this girl for a"—he laughed—"well, it has been only a week, but it has seemed a long while,—and all that time I knew I could not have her. I was resigned to that."

"Of course," she said.



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BLUE ANCHOR INN

"I tried not to tell her, for two reasons. One of these was that it never occurred to me she wanted me. It has not been a common trait in women. And then when she told me she did—well, no matter what happens for all the rest of time, I would not have missed being as happy as I am now."

"Well," she said, quietly, "that's your reward. You can never forget that."

"But the girl?"

"She has the same thing."

"You are so ethereal—so—hypothetical."

She thought a moment.

"But not quixotic," she replied. "You have this thing to do. Why not take all the joy along with it that there is?"

He arose and paced the porch before her.

"But since this has happened," he cried, "that other woman shall never darken my threshold."

At the moment he forgot that he did not possess such a thing under the skies.

"Perhaps she does not wish to," replied Mrs. Gilpin.

He stopped eagerly.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Perhaps, then ——"

She held up her hand.

"I shouldn't bank on it," she said. "Now that you agree with me, I shall confess I don't like that woman. She has a hold on you. She has also some scheme, because she is not frank. You will never be safe until you are clear of her skirts."

"I know it."

"Well, then—I don't want to discourage you—but don't be optimistic."

He took several turns up and down the porch.

"Well, what am I to do?" he said.

"How much have you told the girl?" she demanded.

He explained that she knew the bare fact of his marriage.

"Then she has not gone thus far blindfold. It makes your course easier. You must tell her the whole thing."

"Yes," he said.

"After that do you think you can honorably keep on seeing her?"

"No, I guess not."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"If ever you are free," she said, "there will be time enough."

"Of course you're right. I'll go away."

And when he went out in the air again, the sky was dulled, and the breeze that stirred the trees was gone. The little world that had seemed so glorious to him in its perfectness,—lo, was a mere sandy island. The mirage had passed away.

CHAPTER XXVI

A GREAT change had come over Halsey. In a thoughtless moment Gilpin had brought him a copy of Henry George's book on the Single Tax, little thinking what a high explosive that volume might prove to be. And before Halsey had read three-quarters through it, his soul underwent a change. It was a singular thing that the subject had never been presented to him before. But when it did come it found his system receptive and eager for a new idea. For nearly a month the man had discovered no hills for his brain to climb and had let it run easily along the level. The intellect was not accustomed to this, and now at the end of the period the continued inaction was beginning to be irksome.

Some new food for thought was necessary. It might have been Bahatism, or Christian Science, or Socialism, or World Peace. It happened to be the Single Tax, and at the end of the second day he found that he had always been a single-

BLUE ANCHOR INN

taxer. He read and reread parts of the book that appealed especially to his reason. He took long walks on the beach at night, wandering on with his hands clasped behind him, turning the points of the argument over in his mind, applying it to his own experience, coming upon unexpected flaws and endeavoring to reason them down, trying always to carry the reasoning one stage further and see what happened. This was like food and drink to him.

He went back to the city and returned with other literature on the subject. It was almost impossible now to entice him from his books or his contemplations. He even began the composing of a monograph on the subject, or a special phase of the subject, for publication in a magazine that sometimes published his writings when he was in the throes of a new idea. Conversations with him all began to lead to the same subject, and if you mentioned to him, for instance, that you liked lemon in your tea, in three speeches he would have twisted things around until you found you were talking of the crime of taxing a man for improving his land.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

He found no time now for the relaxations that had heretofore occupied him. Gilpin could no longer tease him for his visits to Miss Grey. For he had not seen that lady since the Single Tax book came.

It is doubtful if he realized this change in his habits. He did not give himself time to reflect that from seeing her on an average of two or three times a day, he had suddenly stopped and now saw her not at all.

But one day he met her on the beach. When he saw her coming, he paused in his ruminating walk on the sands and passed his hand bewilderedly over his eyes, like a person trying to recall something that had occurred long ago in some past existence. She stopped as she approached him. In a confused way he seemed to realize that there was something more youthful and buoyant and happy about her.

"And where have you been for so long?" she cried.

"I?" he said. "I've been—occupied. I have been reading a wonderful book."

"What book?"

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"It's a book on the Single Tax theory." His face brightened. "Let's walk up the beach. I want to tell you about it."

But she held up her hand.

"No," she cried, "no. Not to-day."

He gazed at her with an air of hurt surprise. But instantly he appeared to forget all about her.

"Very well," he said, dismissing the subject, "very well."

Thereupon he nodded absently and left her. She watched him speculatively as he walked up the beach with his hands clasped behind him. She realized now that Herbert Halsey was no longer a chattel of hers. She sighed and continued her walk toward home.

No woman realizes that she has lost her hold on any man, however little he may mean to her, without a pang of surprise and regret. The men she leaves behind her are the milestones of her youth; and as she sees them disappearing in the distance, she discovers that her most precious possession is slipping slowly away from her. Yet no melancholy is so sweet as the regret for a past that one would not recall if one could.

CHAPTER XXVII

IT had been many a long day since two strangers had graced Lugger Island with their presence in the same week. The arrival and departure of Mr. Smithers had been food for conversation among the citizens of the town. But hardly had the excitement caused by this visit died down, than another stranger appeared on the shores. Two strangers in three days was the record up to that time.

This second stranger was a roly-poly sort of man. He was a nice, sleek, little Jack Horner, whose round, pink cheeks and spherical bosom would have endeared him to the heart of the world had he not been ashamed of these heavenly blessings and attempted to gloss them over with an unconscionable amount of dignity. He sat bolt upright in the stern of the little boat, wearing an expression of inscrutable hauteur, while the nose of the craft pointed up in the air at an angle

BLUE ANCHOR INN

of thirty degrees. He landed at the wharf, chucked the boatman half a dollar as though he hated to see it lying around, waddled across the boards and shook hands—with Mr. Still.

"You got my wire?" asked the old gentleman, kindly.

"No, Sam, no. I've just come down here for a little pleasure trip."

"I am glad you got the wire," said the old gentleman, simply.

"Well," responded the newcomer, impatiently, "now we've fallen on each other's necks and kissed each other, let's go talk."

Still took him to a quiet, cool spot under the shadow of one of the old hotels.

"Now tell me about it," demanded Jack Horner.

"Well, we started in the yawl on the thirtieth of May."

"I know that. Begin where I don't know."

"On the thirtieth of May," went on the old man, "and sailed down the coast to the island. As there was no very good place to land, it seemed best to run aground."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Very good," said the little fat man, taking an interest.

"The people were very kind to us—and at length we succeeded in renting a house from them. I got a lot of data and distances and soundings (by jingo, I've been bitten by every crab—male and female—this side of Atlantic City) and then I decided everything was O. K. except a means of getting here."

"Found that out, did you?"

"Eh?"

"Should think you'd have known that before."

"Should you?" The old man fanned himself with his hat. "Well, as I said, that was the objection. Which," he added, absently, "has been met."

"In what way?"

"Concrete piles."

"How much will it cost?"

Still extracted a little wad of paper from his pocket. This was Brooke's estimate for the piling. Then he explained the nature of the piles as it had been explained to him.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Do they know you are a real estate agent?" asked the fat one at length.

"No. I don't believe they do."

"What do they think you are?"

The old man smiled pleasantly.

"A lunatic," he said.

His companion arranged his gold-rimmed eyeglasses on his nose pompously and did a lot of figuring on the back of an envelope.

"Well," he said, presently, "we ought to make a million dollars out of this. Give it three years, and this place will be a seething summer resort."

The old man gazed sorrowfully into the crown of his straw hat.

"I believe," he said, greatly depressed, "I'll soon have to buy a new hat."

"What's that got to do with the business?" demanded the other.

"Nothing."

"You don't seem to be pleased with the transaction?"

"No, I'm not," replied the old man, in his hollow voice. "I don't want to see the place made

BLUE ANCHOR INN

into a summer resort. I like it this way. For two cents I wouldn't put the confounded deal through at all."

The rotund party started in alarm.

"What!"

"I say I wouldn't put it through. These people have treated me well—better than most people in the world have treated me. I told them I wanted to live here—to pass the rest of my days here—by the sea."

"Live here!" cried the little Jack Horner, gasping for breath. "The way it is now? *Good-night!*"

"Well," said Mr. Still, "I should like it."

His companion scrambled to his feet.

"They're right. You're crazy!" he exclaimed.

"Wha' d' ye say?" demanded Still.

"Nothing, nothing."

"Good thing," grumbled the old man. "I don't mind putting through a good stroke of business, but I hate to pull off a sell on people who have treated me well."

"Is that what's bothering you?" cried the little man. "Well, forget it. All they want is the

BLUE ANCHOR INN

money. They're hard up. We're doing them a favor."

"Well," said the old man, at length, "all right. All right."

He rose slowly to his feet and shambled on after his partner, one trouser leg caught in the top of his high shoe, his coat collar half turned up, and the straw hat, perhaps for the last time, swinging back and forward on his ears as a fulerum.

"Now," said the partner, "let's go see the Easymarks."

"Who?"

"The Gilpins, if that's their name." The little man rubbed his hands together gleefully. "This transaction is the greatest piece of business the firm of Still and Brooke ever pulled off," he said, trying to get his companion to rejoice with him in their good fortune.

But Still only shambled on, thinking of anything but the avoirdupois beside him.

Meanwhile, at the Blue Anchor Inn, Brooke was packing a steamer trunk.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"When are you going to see her?" asked Mrs. Gilpin.

"Her" meant only one person to him.

"To-night," he replied. "I'll send my trunk this afternoon, and then there will be no temptation to linger."

"Why are you going, Roger?" asked Halsey, dropping into the room.

Brooke chucked a pink shirt into the depths of the trunk.

"Running away from my wife."

Halsey was abashed.

"Oh, say, that was my pink shirt," he cried, by way of covering his embarrassment.

Brooke fished it out. It had pale blue stripes in it. He handed it to Halsey.

"Thanks," he said gratefully. "I might have worn it."

Gilpin lounged in.

"Sorry to see you going, old chap. But would you mind leaving those shoes of mine?"

"Not at all," responded the other obligingly.

Halsey sat on the foot of the bed, where he could exercise a more thorough supervision.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"The fellow that leaves first," he said with unexpected perspicacity, "always has the advantage."

Mrs. Gilpin, whose wardrobe was not imperiled by the packing operation, was standing by the front window.

"Oh, here they come," she cried, presently.

"Who?"

"Callers. Mrs. Brooke, old Mr. Still and a globular person."

"Hard luck," observed her husband.

"Let's all go down—if we have to talk to Mr. Still."

"You will excuse me," said Brooke.

"No. This is your opportunity to say good-bye to Mrs. Brooke," said Mrs. Gilpin.

They went down together.

"Who is the wide gentleman?" asked Gilpin.

There was no answer. When Mr. Still's pompous partner waddled up on the porch after his companions, with an expression like Cæsar ascending the throne, the others were so fascinated by the ridiculousness of the little pouter-pigeon that they could scarcely forbear from laughing

BLUE ANCHOR INN

in his face. When Mrs. Brooke introduced him, he made a stiff little bow.

"Mrs. Gilpin," said Mrs. Brooke, "I wish to present my husband, Mr. Brooke."

A certain young man in the background gasped and backed up against a post for support. An unnatural silence reigned on the Gilpins' porch.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THIS thunderbolt having been casually dropped into their midst, the dazed inhabitants of the Blue Anchor Inn were reduced to a state of mere gibbering insensibility. Mrs. Brooke, aided and abetted by her husband, thereupon proceeded to unfold a little authentic history dealing with the true inwardness of Mr. Still's activity in the past three or four weeks. She explained their real reason for coming to the island and why they had stayed so long. Mr. Still did not want to spend his old age by the sad sea waves. Oh, no. That was just put in to obscure things,—to give human interest to the event. But the real purpose in purchasing the property was to make a great, live-wire summer resort out of it!

Mrs. Brooke paused to let that statement sink in. But the ground was no longer porous. The victims were not to be caught again. Nothing could astonish them now. If they had been

BLUE ANCHOR INN

informed that the purpose of the investment was to mine for diamonds, or to erect an office building, or to found a university, or to establish an independent republic, their benumbed brains would have considered it as the obvious and proper means of developing the natural resources of the island.

It was not until their guests were preparing to go that their wits and good-humor began to return. The fact that they had been deceived and duped in the sale of the land made no difference to the former owners, because all they wanted was to sell it—and the future disposal of it did not greatly concern them. And then the true significance of this unforeseen Mr. Brooke dawned upon them. Roger Brooke, in the twinkling of an eye, was released from the toils and machinations of a woman, who appeared none the less terrible now that they knew that there never had been any toils and machinations. The fact that he was merely transferred from the power of a known woman to the power of an unknown one had no force, so glad were they that this was not his wife.

Brooke had further cause for joy in the fact

BLUE ANCHOR INN

that the two men made arrangements with him for a meeting in the city to talk over plans for the immediate construction of the concrete trestle and roadway from the main shore across the channel. This would be the biggest commission his firm had yet had, and the resultant advertisement would mean a great stride toward ultimate success. He felt that his vacation had really been worth while.

"Marianne," observed Mr. Brooke an hour later in the privacy of their boudoir, "let's beat it, quick."

"I'm with you," cried his fair and dainty wife enthusiastically. "I feel as if I had done thirty days in jail."

"Oh, this place is the best regulated cemetery in the East. How do the Easymarks stand living here?"

"Oh," she said, yawning, "they've had a liberal Sunday-school education, and they lead a sheltered life. They'd just as soon look at a sunset as a moving-picture show, and when they're in town they eat at home in preference to a swell café."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"I guess they hold on to it," observed the husband with apparent irrelevanee.

"Glue on their fingers," said she.

"Say," he asked, at length, "what did they rubber at me like that for when you introduced me to 'em?"

His wife began to giggle.

"Why, it's this way," she explained. "That Brooke man you met has got a wife somewhere who can't make up her mind whether to divorce him or not. I got that from a clipping Unele Sam cut out of the paper, and from a few things Mrs. Gilpin has let fall. It seems none of these Gilpins ever saw her and there's some mystery in it. I don't believe Brooke ever talks about her." She paused to toss a few things into her open suitcase.

"Well," she continued, "when I began keeping dark about you, and side-stepping all solicitous inquiries—you know it wasn't any use their getting next to who you were and then doping out who Uncle Sam was ——"

She interrupted herself to look at him inquiringly.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Sure. That's right. Good business!" commented her husband.

"Well," she went on, "when I got to doing the mysterious game, I think they jumped to the conclusion that I was *his* Mrs. Brooke, and was trying to rope him in. Anyhow, that's the way they acted. Well, I didn't mind a little flirtation with him at first, because it was some slow down here; but when it got too fervent, I had to ice it down."

The husband frowned.

"Too fervent?" he said.

"Oh, nothing real. I thought he was trying to jolly me along so as to learn what we came for. He was some curious."

Mr. Brooke summoned together all his muscular force and hoisted himself slowly out of his chair.

"Well, I'm glad we found him. He'll do us good. I never saw that jewelry before," he said abruptly, picking up a couple of pins that were lying on her bureau.

"Miss Grey's," she replied. "I borrow hers sometimes."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"What good is she to you?" he asked.
"Does she earn her way?"

"Sure she does," announced his wife, emphatically. "She's lived with swell people, and she knows the smart ideas. She posts me all the time on how the real chosen few do it. Why, when I was in town I was the best dressed woman in any of the hotels. Oh, Miss Grey's been worth all I've paid her."

"All right. Good advertisement," agreed the other. "Can you trust her to pack up everything to send back on the boat and close up things generally here?"

"Certainly."

"Then let's hike for civilization now. She can follow us to-morrow."

"The sooner the quicker," said Marianne, with a great sigh of relief.

Meanwhile the other Mr. Brooke was unpacking his trunk again. His host came into the room and planted himself comfortably in a chair before him.

"Now, Roger," said he, "my advice to you is to find out where your confounded wife is, and

BLUE ANCHOR INN

find out quick. Telegraph to the lawyer that got you into this mess and tell him to wire her bank for her address. He knows where she keeps her money. Or perhaps he knows what securities she owns. There must be some place her dividends are sent if she's alive, or isn't a myth. You're sure you did marry some one?" he demanded.

"Yes," replied the other, meekly.

"Then, when you find her address, go and see her. Find out what she intends to do. If she says she won't get a divorce, explain to her that she can go to the dickens. If she says she will, then you can be happy and stop bothering your friends."

Brooke folded up a pair of trousers and laid them thoughtfully in the drawer.

"No matter how fully I explained to her," he said slowly, "that she had my permission to go to the dickens, I'm afraid it wouldn't help me much."

"Well," replied his companion, lamely, "you would at least know about it."

The great advantage of being thus informed

BLUE ANCHOR INN

did not appeal to the young man. Nevertheless, he wrote out the telegram as directed and despatched Willy with it in the motor boat to the mainland.

At the same time Willy took the telegram, he took also Mr. and Mrs. Brooke and Mr. Still. The entire population of the island accumulated to see them off, Captain John foremost among them. He pushed forward to shake the old man by the hand.

"You may not be jest right 'n the head," he said, tactfully, "but I will say you're real good comp'ny."

"Thank you, John," said Mr. Still. "Same to you."

Still drew aside Brooke—the wifeless Brooke. He fished a yellow ball out of his trousers pocket. When unfolded it proved to be a twenty dollar bill.

"Buy something for Mrs. Gilpin from me," he whispered.

Brooke nodded and stepped forward to say good-bye to Mrs. Brooke. She looked at him with a knowing smile.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"It was a strange coincidence, wasn't it, that we should have the same name?" she said.

"It was an invention of the devil," he asserted.

CHAPTER XXIX

BUT when Roger Brooke actually received a telegram on the following day from Mr. Sprague giving a street and number in Philadelphia as his wife's address, he was stricken with fright at the prospect before him. However, there was no excuse for delay, and he prepared to make the trip to Philadelphia by the evening train. No actor on the occasion of his first performance, no public man making his maiden speech could have been more perturbed.

He called on Dita Grey, ostensibly to bid her good-bye, but also in the hope that she might be arranging to leave by the same train. He might have bluntly asked her to do so, but it appeared inadvisable to make a point of it, under the circumstances. He found her seated on the floor in the midst of the disarray occasioned by the rounding up of Mrs. Brooke's belongings and sending them to the yawl. From her careless and nonchalant attitude and her apparent sur-

BLUE ANCHOR INN

prise at seeing him, it would not have seemed that she was expecting him.

"I am going away to-day," she said, placidly.

"So am I," he replied. He rather hoped this would bring about a discussion of trains. But conversations are very unmanageable things.

"Are you going to see your wife?" was what she asked.

This was rather blunt. She was often blunt.

"Yes," he replied, for want of something better to say.

She picked up a piece of paper and began to fold it.

"You don't often speak of your wife."

"No."

She looked up quickly.

"Nor to her?"

"I must tell you," he said, humbly. "I don't know who my wife is."

She only made little tracks in the paper with her thumb nail.

"I—I—it's very humiliating to have to tell it," he went on—"but I married her because some one gave me five hundred dollars to do it."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

He looked at her to see how she took that statement. Her head was averted. He was thoroughly miserable.

"Don't you think that was contemptible?" he demanded.

When she looked up her face was wreathed in smiles.

"But," she said, brightly, "think how happy it made her."

He had no reply to that. But he was glad she did not despise him.

"What did she look like?" demanded the girl in a moment.

"I don't know. She wore a veil."

"Was she—fat?"

"No."

"Was she slim—like I am?"

He looked at her.

"Yes, I should say—slim—like you are."

"And you haven't seen her since?"

"No. She went West—to get a divorce."

The girl looked up with interest, and moved across the floor till she was close to his knees.

"And," she asserted, "she didn't get it?"

BLUE ANCHOR INN

He shook his head. She laughed softly.

"Why do you laugh?"

"I don't blame her," she said, and gave him a wonderful glance from under her long lashes.

They were interrupted then by the entrance of Mrs. Brooke's colored retainer, who slowed across the room and lifted a box of china Dita had been packing. She followed him to the door to explain minutely just how it should be carried and where it should be put and what should be put on top of it and what should not, and so many other things that it took the colored retainer nearly five minutes to forget them. Having thus attended to her duties, she returned to find out how many things she had forgotten to put in the box. This was discouraging, because there were a great many. But finally she got them all corralled and huddled in a bunch where she could keep an eye on them and see that they did not escape again. She went to the window and looked out at the gray sea.

"I've been thinking about the lady," she said, with her back to him. "I've been thinking that perhaps I understand her."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Yes," he replied.

She hesitated.

"This girl—she was an orphan—or, at least, there was no near person to look after her?"

He nodded.

"I think I can understand," she said. "I was like that. I do not remember my father and mother. I worked in an office when I was fifteen. And I lived in a boarding-house and met no one. I never saw a man of my own age whom I could like—or even talk to. If she were like that ——"

She paused a moment.

"Yes," he said.

"Why," she went on, "when the girl got out West it might have occurred to her that since she was married to a cleaner and finer and a more upstanding man than had ever before come into her life ——"

"How could she have thought it?" he broke in.

"It's possible." She gazed attentively at the whitecaps rolling in over the lead sea. "I thought those things when I first saw you."

He made two steps and caught her to him.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

She held him close, her white arms about his neck. Then she freed herself.

"You interrupt me," she protested.

He retired and stood before the fireplace.

"Go on."

She nervously crumpled her handkerchief in her hands.

"If she thought those things about you that I have said," she went on, "she might have decided to come back—out of curiosity—to see what her husband was like."

"It isn't probable," he asserted.

She smiled a little.

"Were you ever a woman?" was her unanswerable reply.

The little clock on the mantel-shelf struck eleven.

"I must go," he forced himself to say.

She put her hands on his shoulders and looked into his face.

"And are you never coming to see me again?"

"Not until——" He paused. "Well, I think you understand."

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"You mean when she lets you go?"

He nodded.

"I wonder," he exclaimed, "if she ever will!"

She shook her head. Keen surprise showed in his face.

"Why?" he asked.

Her reply was simple.

"I know the woman."

"You know my wife? How? Where?" he cried, excitedly.

"She came to Mrs. Brooke for the position I have now."

"But she has plenty of money," he exclaimed quickly.

"I know. She told me. I was in her confidence," Dita went on hurriedly. "She told me that she wanted to meet her husband—you, that is—without your being aware of it. Through somebody's mistake she understood that these Brookes were related to you. So she thought if she connected herself with them she might meet you."

He was thoughtful.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"That's pathetic," he said.

"Oh, no. It's funny. If she had only known then how wrong—and yet how right—her guess was."

"And she would have had your place," he said, thoughtfully.

She looked at him quizzically. Then she waited. Still his face gave no sign. Presently she began to laugh.

She tried again.

"Would you like to know the name your wife assumed in applying for the place?" she asked.

"Why, yes," he replied, innocently.

"It was Grey."

She looked—and the spark had caught.

"Thunder!" he said, dazed.

And this time when he held her in his arms he knew she was his.

"The ring?" he asked, at length.

There was a fine gold chain about her neck. He had seen it sometimes when she wore low-cut dresses. Fastened to the end of it she showed him the ring.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

"Mrs. Brooke—the other Mrs. Brooke"—she laughed, shyly—"found it on my bureau once and wore it. I was so frightened I have worn it on this chain ever since."

He took it off and put it on her finger, where it belonged.

"How about the jade earrings?"

"Jade earrings?" she answered, puzzled.

"Mrs. Brooke has been wearing them. That's what put us on the wrong track."

"Has she?" she cried. "I never thought of that. She has been wearing a good many of my trinkets. I got tired of them. I can't endure dangley things like they are."

They did not hear the little clock when it struck twelve. Nor when it struck one. But it seemed they had scarcely been sitting in the chair a minute when Ned Gilpin burst in.

"Oh, Roger," he called, before he came in, "come on to lunch."

Then he entered.

Of course it was an embarrassing situation for Dita. But the high color became her immensely.

BLUE ANCHOR INN

“Ned,” said Roger, “I present you to my wife.”

But, as has been said before, by this time you could not astonish Gilpin with anything.



