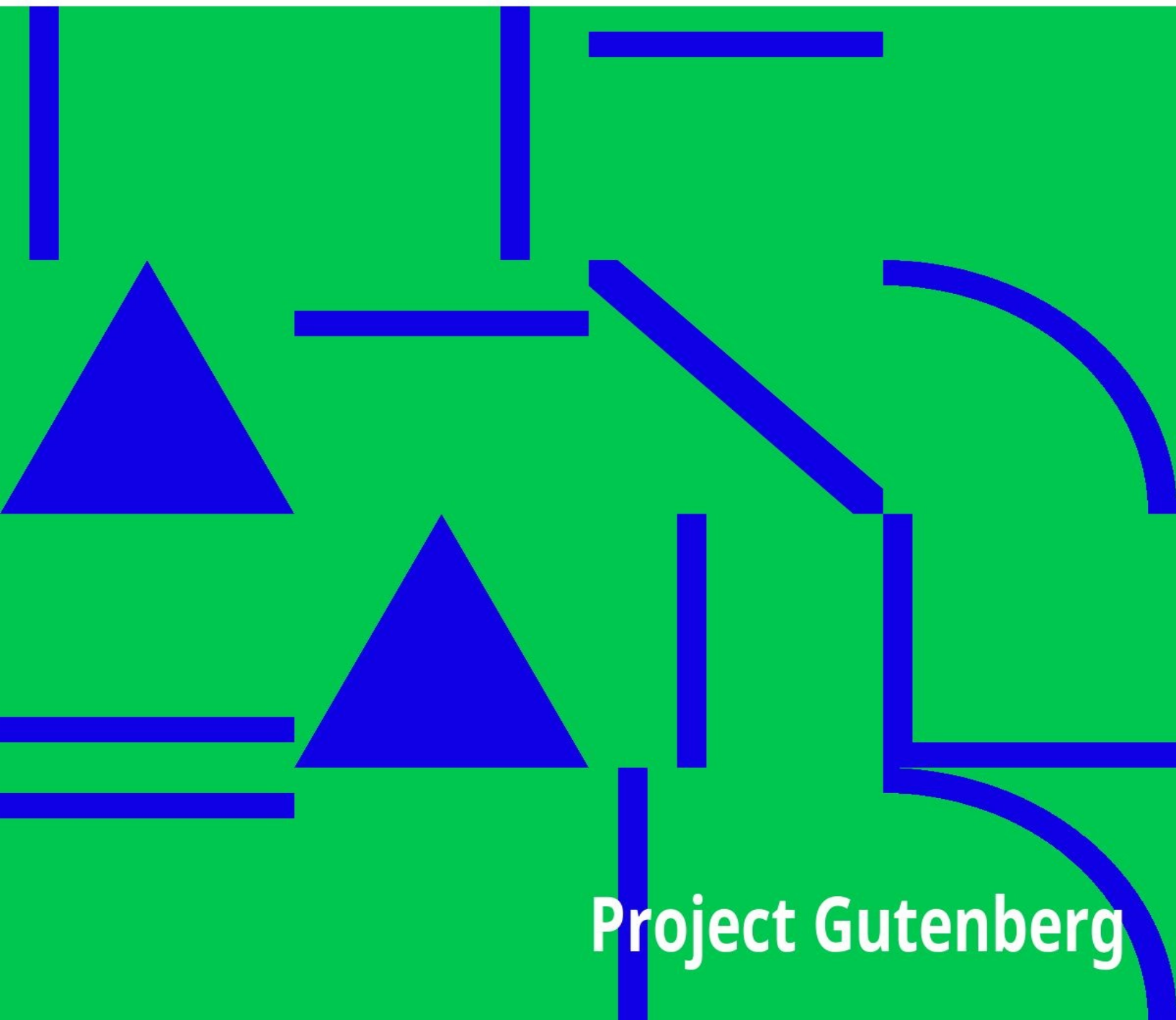


The Admirable Tinker

Child of the World

Edgar Jepson



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Title: The Admirable Tinker
Child of the World

Author: Edgar Jepson

Illustrator: Margaret Eckerson

Release Date: August 8, 2006 [EBook #19010]

Language: English

*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE ADMIRABLE TINKER ***

Produced by Al Haines

"Here's my father, or the police!"

[Frontispiece: "Here's my father, or the police!"]

THE ADMIRABLE TINKER

CHILD OF THE WORLD

BY EDGAR JEPSON

**Illustrated by
Margaret Eckerson**

**NEW YORK
McCLURE, PHILLIPS & CO.
MCMIV**

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**Published, March, 1904
Third Impression**

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"Here's my father, or the police!" Frontispiece

He surveyed himself with an excited curiosity.

"I can't hold him!"

He poured comforting assurances of safety into her ears.

"She was quite out of control for a good five minutes."

"To-night reflect on your misdeeds. To-morrow
we will treat of your ransom."

The pursuit was lively, but short.

It was his first essay as coiffeur.

As a battering-ram against the first and second buttons
of his waistcoat.

"Hold it back!" screamed Tinker.

Over these agreeable occupations they talked.

And she paused to let the splendour of the gift sink in.

It's time these lubbers walked the plank.

THE ADMIRABLE TINKER

CHAPTER ONE

SIR TANCRED'S QUEST

"It is," said Lord Crosland, "deucedly odd."

"What?" said Sir Tancred Beauleigh.

"That after seeing nothing of one another for nearly three years, we should arrive at this caravanserai from different stations at the same time, to find that our letters engaging this set of rooms came by the same post."

"It comes of having been born on the same day," said Sir Tancred. "Besides, I always told you that the only possible place to live in in town was the top left-hand corner of the Hotel Cecil, with this view up the river, and a nice open breezy space in front of you."

Lord Crosland, who was walking up and down the room as he talked, stopped to gaze out of the window at Westminster, and Sir Tancred lighted another cigarette.

"What I like about it is, it's retired—out of the world," said Lord Crosland.

"It was just that recommended it to me."

A waiter came in, and cleared away the breakfast. Lord Crosland admired the view; Sir Tancred lay back in his easy chair, gazing with vacant, sombre eyes into the clear blue vault of the summer sky.

"I can't see why we shouldn't share these rooms for the season," said Lord Crosland, when the waiter had gone with his tray. "We shall get on all right; we always did at Vane's."

"Well," said Sir Tancred slowly, "I have a child, a boy, somewhere—I don't know where. I've got to find him. I'm going to find him before I do anything else."

"The deuce you have! Well, I'll be shot! To think that you're married!"

"I was married when I said good-bye to you nearly three years ago," said Sir Tancred. "I was married to Pamela Vane."

"You were married to Miss Vane!" cried Lord Crosland. "But how—how on earth did you manage it? It was impossible!"

"I committed that legal misdemeanour known as false entry," said Sir Tancred coolly. "I added the necessary years to our ages."

"Oh, yes, that, of course," said Lord Crosland. "You wouldn't let an informality of that kind stand in your way. But Miss Vane? How did you persuade her? I should have thought it impossible—absolutely impossible."

"It ran as near impossibility as anything I can think of," said Sir Tancred slowly and half dreamily. "But when you are in love with one another, impossibilities fade—and I was masterful."

"You were that," said Lord Crosland with conviction.

"Poor Pamela! She was wretched at having to keep it from her father; and I was sorry enough. But it had to be done; when you are eighteen, and in love with one another, twenty-one seems ages away, don't you know?"

"Of course."

"And once done, I don't believe—honestly, I don't believe that she regretted it," said Sir Tancred; and his sombre eyes were shining. "Heavens, how happy we were!—for four months. But as you'll learn, if ever you have it, happiness is a deucedly expensive thing. I paid a price for it—I *did* pay a price." And he shivered. "At the end of four months it came out, and it was all up."

"Then that was why Vane gave up coaching, sold Stanley House, and went abroad," said Lord Crosland quickly. "We could none of us make it out."

"That was why. When it came out, my stepmother came on the scene. She's about as remarkable a creature as you'll chance on between now and the blue moon. She has one idea in her head, the glory of the Beauleighs. I believe she's as mad as a hatter about it. She was one of the Stryke & Wigrams, the bankers, a Miss Wigram; and I think, don't you know, that rising out of that wealthy and respectable firm, she felt bound to be the bluest-blooded possible. That's what I fancy. At any rate she's more of a Beauleigh than any Beauleigh since the flood."

"I know," said Lord Crosland, and he nodded gravely with the immeasurable sapience of a boy of twenty-one.

"I must say, too," Sir Tancred went on thoughtfully, "that she's been the most important Beauleigh for generations. She brought thirty thousand a year to the restoration of our dilapidated fortunes; and she did restore them. You know what a County is: well, little by little she got a grip on the County, and now she just runs it. I tell you, the County has taken to spending every bit of the year it can in town or abroad; when it gets within thirty miles of her, it daren't call its life its own."

"By Jove!" said Lord Crosland earnestly. "She must be a holy terror."

"They call it force of character when she's within thirty miles of them," said Sir Tancred drily; and then he went on with more emphasis: "But the banker streak comes out in her; she thinks too much of money. She doesn't understand that money's a thing you spend on things that amuse you; she's always making shows with it—dull shows. So it was part of her scheme for the glory of Beauleigh, that if billions couldn't be got, I was to marry millions. You can imagine her fury when she learned that I was married to Pamela."

"I can that," said Lord Crosland.

"She got me back to Beauleigh, on some rotten pretence of legal business about mortgages; and made a descent on Mr. Vane. You know that he was as decent a soul as ever lived, and as sensitive. I'm afraid that there was a lot of Stryke & Wigram in that interview—you know, talk about having entrapped me into marriage with his daughter—the last man in the world to dream of it. Fortunately, as I gathered from her talk later, she made him angry enough to turn her out of the house without seeing Pamela. She had to content herself with writing to her—it must have been a letter."

"Why on earth didn't you interfere? I wouldn't have stood it!" said Lord Crosland.

"I was at Beauleigh. I was pretty soon suspicious that our secret had been discovered. When three days passed without my getting a letter from Pamela, I was sure of it. And then Fortune played into my stepmother's hands: I had a bad fall with a young horse, and injured my spine. For two months it was touch and go whether I was a cripple for life; and I was another four months on my back."

"By Jove!" said Lord Crosland with profound sympathy.

"Ah, but it was when I began to mend that my troubles began. There were no letters for me—not a letter. Just think of it! I knew that Pamela must be wanting me; and there I lay a helpless log. I was sure that she had written; and, knowing my stepmother, I was sure that I should never see the letters. I sent for her, and asked for them. She coolly told me that she and her brother, my other guardian, Sir Everard Wigram, Bumpkin Wigram he's generally called, had decided that I was to be saved, if possible, from the results of my folly at any cost. They would have taken steps to have the marriage nullified, if it hadn't been for the risk of my being prosecuted for false entry. Then she talked of my ingratitude after all her efforts to raise the Beauleighs to their former glory. I couldn't stand any more that day; and the nurse came in and fetched her out. That interview didn't do me any good."

"It hardly sounds the thing for an injured spine," said Lord Crosland.

"A few days later we had another; and she had the cheek to tell me that one day I should be grateful to her for having saved me from the clutches of a designing girl—rank idiocy, you see, for she was only keeping us apart for the time being. But it set me talking about the firm of Stryke & Wigram; and for once I got her really angry. It did me good. Yet, you know, she really believed it; she believed that she was acting for the best."

"Of course," said Lord Crosland thoughtfully, "she didn't know Miss Vane, I mean Lady Beauleigh, your wife. It would have made all the difference."

"I've made that excuse for her often enough," said Sir Tancred. "But it doesn't carry very far. Just look at the cold-bloodedness of it: there was I, a helpless cripple, in a good deal of pain most of the time, mad for a word of my wife; and that damned woman kept back her letters. Talk about the cruelty of the Chinese

—an ordinary woman can give them points, and do it cheerfully!"

"They are terrors," said Lord Crosland with conviction.

"Well, there I lay; and I had to grin and bear it. But, well, I don't want to talk about it. The only relief was that once a week my stepmother seemed to feel bound to come and tell me that it was all for my good; and I could talk to her about the manners and customs of the banking classes. Then, after five and a half months of it, when I was looking forward to getting free and to my wife, she came and told me that Pamela was dead. I refused to believe it; and she gave me a letter from Vane's solicitor informing her of the fact."

"Poor beggar!" said Lord Crosland.

Sir Tancred was silent; he was staring at nothing with sombre eyes.

Lord Crosland looked at him compassionately; presently he said, "It explains your face—the change in it. I was wondering at it. I couldn't understand it."

"What change? What's the matter with my face?" said Sir Tancred indifferently.

"Well, you used to be a cheerful-looking beggar, don't you know. Now you look like what do you call him—who fell from Heaven—Lucifer, son of the Morning. I read about him at Vane's, mugging up poetry for that exam."

"You'll hardly believe it," said Sir Tancred very seriously, "but I took to reading books myself at Beauleigh, when I got all right—reading books and mooning about. I had no energy. I went and saw Vane's solicitor of course; but he could tell me nothing, or wouldn't tell me. Said his client had called on him, and told him to inform my stepmother of Pamela's death, and had not told him where she died, or where he was now living. I fancied he was keeping something back; but I had no energy, and I didn't drag it out of him. I went to Stanley House; it was to be let. No one could tell me where the Vanes had gone. I stayed at Beauleigh—mooning about. I wouldn't go to Oxford; and I wouldn't travel. I mooned about. Six months ago I came across Vicary at a meet—you remember Vicary at Vane's?—he told me that Vane had died in Jersey. I went to Jersey, and found Vane's grave. Next to it was my wife's."

Again Sir Tancred fell silent in a gloomy musing.

"Well?" said Lord Crosland gently.

"The oddest thing happened. It doesn't sound exactly credible; and you won't understand it. I don't. But as I stood by the grave, I suddenly felt that there was something for me to do, something very important that had to be done. It was odd, very odd. I went back to my hotel quite harassed, puzzling and racking my brains. Then an idea struck me; and I had a hunt through the registers. I found that two days before she died a boy was born, Hildebrand Anne Beauleigh—the old Beauleigh names. She knew that I should like him to be called by them. From the registers I learnt where they had been living. I rushed off to the house, and found it empty and to let—always these shut-up houses. I made inquiries and inquiries, from the house agents and the tradespeople. I could learn nothing. They had lived very quietly. But there was a child; people had seen him wheeled about in a perambulator. He had disappeared. I suspected my stepmother at once; and I hurried back to Beauleigh. It had bucked me up, don't you know, to think that I had a child. I had it out with my stepmother; and what do you think she told me?"

"Can't guess; but I'm laying odds that it doesn't surprise me," said Lord Crosland.

"She said that the fact of my having a son and heir would stand in the way of my making the marriage she hoped. That the boy was in the hands of a respectable couple, where I need never hope to find him; that he would be brought up in the station of life suitable to his mother's having been the daughter of a Tutor. My word, I did talk about the firm of Stryke & Wigram!"

"I should think you must have," said Lord Crosland.

"I lost no time, but put the matter in the hands of a crack Private Inquiry Agency. When they learned what I was doing, I'm hanged if my stepmother and uncle Bumpkin didn't stop my allowance." He laughed ruefully. "However, I kept the inquiries going by selling my two horses, my jewellery, my guns, and my clothes. That's why I'm in these rags. But no good came of it; the private detective discovered nothing, and charged me nearly three hundred for discovering it. But the crowning point of my stepmother's madness came yesterday. We had the proper business interview on my coming of age; and she and uncle Bumpkin handed me over six hundred a year, and six thousand ready money. Then she made me an offer. She would give me ten thousand a year to

enable me to keep up the glory of the Beauleighs, and marry the millions to increase it, if I would give up searching for the boy, and consent to his being brought up in his respectable position. I didn't talk about swindling him out of his rights; for I've come to the conclusion that it's no good talking of Justice to a woman. They don't understand what you're driving at—those of the banking classes anyhow. I told her she could stick to Beauleigh Court, since it would only be a white elephant to me with my six hundred a year, and go on ruling the County. But I was going to clear out, and I couldn't help saying that I hoped her path and mine would never cross again."

"It was deuced little to say," said Lord Crosland.

"Oh, what was the good? She couldn't have understood. She's mad, mad as a hatter about the glory of the Beauleighs. But it did one good thing; it made her cast me off for good and all. She'd toiled for the family: and this was her reward. I might go to the Workhouse my own way. Now you see, she won't interfere to stop my finding the boy. And I'm going to find him if I have to spend ten years on it, and every penny I have. And when I have found him, I'm going to look after him myself, and keep him with me. I don't suppose I shall find it much in my line. I'm not fond of children; and I'm not an affectionate person. That sort of thing is rather dried up in me. But it was little enough I could do for my wife while she was alive, and now I should like to do the only thing I can."

"I see," said Lord Crosland.

"Well, you can understand that, though I've agreed to share these rooms with you for the next few days, I can't make it a permanent arrangement. I may have to be off anywhere at a moment's notice. On the other hand, by offering a thumping big reward, as I can do at last, I shall probably find him at once; and you wouldn't care for rooms with a small child about."

"Oh, I don't know. I rather like kids," said Lord Crosland. "They're amusing little beggars often enough."

"Ah, but this one is so small; only two and a half," said Sir Tancred. "And now I'll write the advertisement."

CHAPTER TWO

THE FINDING OF TINKER

Sir Tancred went to the writing-table, sat down, and began to write. He wrote slowly, pausing to think, and made many erasures.

"I think the advertisement will make my stepmother squirm. It'll make the County talk," he said thoughtfully.

"It seems to me you can't help giving the show away," said Lord Crosland.

There came a knock at the door, and a waiter came in: "Please, Sir Tancred, there's a lady, leastways a person, wanting to see you."

"To see me?" said Sir Tancred with some surprise. "Who can it be? Show her up?"

He went on with his writing, and presently the waiter ushered in a tall, gaunt woman, with a rugged, hard-featured face, dressed in the rustiest black, and carrying a brown-paper parcel.

Sir Tancred turned round in his chair, and she said very nervously, "Good-morning, sir."

"Good-morning," said Sir Tancred; then he sprang up and cried, "Why—why—it's Selina Goodyear!"

"Yes, sir, it's me. I was afraid you wouldn't remember me after all this time. And—and—it's a liberty I'm taking, coming to see you like this," she went on with a voluble, nervous eagerness, twisting her hands. "But not getting any answer to my letters, I went down to Beauleigh Court yesterday on the chance of getting a word with you; for I knew you'd be bound to be there, seeing as it was your coming of age. But I didn't get a chance, and came back to London by the last train, not knowing as you was in it, till I came out of Victoria, and saw you getting into a cab and heard you tell the cabman to drive here. And I made up my mind to come and see you here, though I know it's a liberty I'm taking. But I can't help it,"—and her voice suddenly grew fierce,—"it's about the boy."

"The boy! My boy!" cried Sir Tancred.

"Yes, sir. You see I was his nurse from the first. Poor Miss Pamela—I mean Lady Beauleigh, sir—gave him to me to take care of before she died—leastways, she didn't give him to me, she was too weak, poor dear; but she told me to take care of him, as I wrote to you, sir."

"As you wrote? Yes; go on."

"And I did take care of him till Mr. Vane died. And oh, he was such a dear baby! Then, when the young lawyer came with Mrs. Bostock and told me as how you had arranged for her to have charge of him, and I had to give him over to her, it nearly broke my heart. But it isn't about myself I came to talk, but about him. I know it's troubling you, sir—and a gentleman has his pleasures, and they take up his time. But, after all, he's your own son, sir, and if you'd only come and see him for yourself, you wouldn't let him be treated like he is——"

"You know where he is!" Sir Tancred almost shouted.

"Why, of course, sir. I told you in my letters. He's living with them Bostocks, out Catford way."

"You must take me to him at once!" cried Sir Tancred; and he rushed into his bedroom, and came out with a hat and stick.

"Look here, old chap," said Lord Crosland. "I'm going to clear out for a few days. You'd like the kid to yourself at first. Then I'll come back and share the rooms if you like."

"Oh, no; it'll be all right," said Sir Tancred, and he hurried Selina from the room to the lift, from the lift to a cab.

They were no sooner settled in it, and the driver was getting quickly through the traffic under the stimulus of a promise of treble his fare, than Sir Tancred turned to Selina, and said quickly: "What do you mean by saying that I would not let the child be treated as he is? How's he treated?"

"I mean that he's starved and beaten, that's what I mean, sir," said Selina. "Just what I said in my letters."

"But I was told he was in the hands of respectable people."

"Respectable!" exclaimed Selina: "but I told you in my letters all about them, sir."

"When did you write to me?" said Sir Tancred.

"First when Miss Pamela died; and then when Mr. Vane died,"—Sir Tancred saw how his stepmother had obtained the information which enabled her to get possession of the child,— "and three times since October."

"Since October!" cried Sir Tancred; he had never dreamed that the suppression of his letters had continued after his recovery.

"I only found the boy in October," said Selina.

"Look here," said Sir Tancred, "you'd better tell me the whole story from the beginning. I didn't get your letters."

"You didn't get them?" said Selina, and her face cleared. "I thought you couldn't have, sir. I knew you wasn't the one to take no notice of them. Well, it was like this, sir. When Mrs. Bostock took the boy away, I began to worry and worry about him; I kind of pined for him. Then I thought if I could see him sometimes, I should feel better; and I never liked the looks of Mrs. Bostock. She looked like a drinker; though all the time she was in Jersey with the lawyer she kept sober enough. I had got another place in St. Hellers, but I couldn't stand worrying about him, and wondering if he was well treated. And I didn't like the way she wouldn't tell me where she lived. I had my savings, too; so I gave up my place, and came to London to look for her. I knew she lived in South London from something she let drop; and I took a room in Lambeth and looked for her in neighbourhoods which would be likely for her to live in. But it's a large place, sir, and I was months and months doing it, moving from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. I used to trapse and trapse about all day, and at night I used to go into Publics, the saloon bars as well as the common bars, for I didn't know which class she really belonged to. I went into hundreds of Publics, but I never set eyes on her. Then, last October, when I'd nearly come to the end of my savings, I saw her going into a Public at New Cross. I couldn't believe it; it seemed too good to be true. I thought I must have made a mistake; I daren't go in, for fear she should know me; and I thought she never would come out. When she did come out, and I saw it was really 'er, I nearly fainted right away; but I follered 'er, and she went from Public to Public with two shops in between, and it was nearly ten o'clock

when she took the tram, and past eleven when she got to her cottage at Catford, for she stopped at two more Publics. But I walked about all night, for I wasn't going to take no chances; and next morning I found, sure enough, that the child was there. But he was that changed, and he didn't know me." Her harsh voice sank to the mournfullest tone; and she paused.

Sir Tancred said nothing, he could say nothing; he was amazed and profoundly touched by the persistence of this passionate, single-eyed devotion in this hard-featured, harsh-voiced, rugged creature.

"Well, sir," Selina went on, "I moved to Eltham, and took a room. I soon found out what sort the Bostocks were. Every Saturday they drew two pounds for the keep of the child; and they were hardly ever sober till Thursday. And they starved the child, sir; and sometimes they beat him. Now and then, when they were drunk, I've got food, good food to him. But not often, for he was their livelihood, and however drunk they was, they kept an eye on him; mostly he's locked up in a bedroom. I wrote to you, sir, three times, and waited and waited for answers till I was sick at heart; and things was getting worse and worse. I couldn't have stood it any longer; I was just going to steal him and carry him off somewhere where I could look after him without no one interfering. But I thought I'd see you, and tell you about it first. And now, sir, if you'd let me have charge of him"—her eyes fairly blazed with eagerness—"I'd look after him properly—I would, indeed. And I shouldn't want no two pounds a week—why, five shillings, five shillings would be ample, sir. I'm a capable woman, and I can get as much charring as ever I can do."

"Of course, you shall have charge of him," said Sir Tancred. "You seem to be the only person in the world who has any right to have charge of him."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" said Selina in a husky voice; and she dabbed at her eyes.

"It's not for you to thank me; it's for me to thank you," said Sir Tancred.

"Oh, no, sir!" said Selina quickly. "I know what gentlemen are. I've been in service in good houses. They have their sport and their pleasures; and they can't attend to things like this."

"I've been looking for him for six months—ever since I knew that I had a child," said Sir Tancred in a very bitter voice.

"Have you now, sir?" said Selina. "Ah, if I'd only known, and come to you!"

Her story had tided them over the greater part of their journey; and for the rest of it they were silent, Sir Tancred immersed in a bitter reverie, Selina sitting with a hand on each knee, bent forward, with shining eyes, breathing quickly.

Towards the end of their journey she had to direct the cabman; and past the last long row or little red-brick villas, in a waste from which the agriculturalist had retired in favour of the jerry-builder, they came to the goal, three dirty, tumble-down cottages. The cab stopped at the third cottage; Selina sat back in the seat and pulled down her veil, in case Mrs. Bostock should recognise her; Sir Tancred got down and knocked at the door. A long-drawn snore was the only answer. He hammered on the door with his cane till he heard the grating of a chair on a brick floor; the door opened, and a blowsy, red-faced woman peered at him with blinking eyes.

"You have a little boy here in your charge. I've come for him," said Sir Tancred.

The woman only blinked at him stupidly.

"I've come for the little boy," said Sir Tancred loudly.

A look of drunken cunning stole into the woman's muddled face. She said thickly, "There ain't no lil boy 'ere," and tried to shut the door.

Sir Tancred thrust it open with a vigour which sent her staggering into a chair, and stepped into the squalid, reeking room. Hunched up in a chair, opposite the woman, sat a snoring man.

"Come!" said Sir Tancred. "I want no nonsense! Where's the child?"

A dull, muddled rage gathered in the woman's eyes; she made an effort to rise on quite irresponsive legs. "Halbut!" she howled. "Halbut, wake up! Here's a thief an' a burglar trying to steal the brat!"

The man grunted, and jerked out of his sleep with the mystic word, "Washishish?"

"It'sh burglarsh, Halbut!" cried the woman, who seemed suddenly to see two

or more Sir Tancreds. "They're shtealing bratsh! Bash 'em!"

Halbut jerked onto his feet, and stood lurching:

"Englishmansh oush ish ish cashle," he said, with a ferocity which petered out in an idiotic grin.

"Thash it! Bash 'em!" cried the woman.

Halbut advanced in a circular movement on Sir Tancred, with his fists up; "Englishmansh oush ish ish cashle," he said firmly.

Sir Tancred lunged smartly at his chest with his cane; and he tumbled down with his face to the wall.

"Englishmansh oush ish ish cashle," he said drowsily to the wainscot, and was still.

Sir Tancred took the woman gingerly by the shoulder, and gave her a shake. "Where's the child?" he said.

Apparently he had shaken the fumes up and the intelligence down, for her only answer was a burst of sibilant incoherence.

With an exclamation of impatient disgust he loosed her, and went into the back room. It was empty. He went up the rickety stairs, and, as he had expected, found the door of the bedroom locked. He kicked it open and went into the frowsy room. The child was not in it. He came downstairs and opened the back door. As he did so, he heard a scuttling rustle. The garden was empty, but the rustle he had heard set him exploring the dirty, rag-covered hedge with keen eyes. He saw nothing, and walked down the garden, stooping and peering into the bottom of the hedge. Half-way down it his eyes fell on two little black feet, just sticking out; and above them two frightened eyes stared through the twigs.

Sir Tancred put his hands in among them gently, and drew out a tiny child; his peaked little face was black, his thin little arms and legs were black, he was clothed in filthy rags; and his yellowish hair was a tangled mat. The child struggled like a very feeble little wild beast, clawing and scratching, but silent with a terrible silence which showed how he had learned to dread drawing attention to himself.

"Quiet! quiet! I'm not going to hurt you," said Sir Tancred in a gentle voice, a little husky with a piercing emotion which had invaded him; and something in its tones really did quiet the child, for he struggled no more, though his breath came in a quick, faint, terrified panting.

Sir Tancred took him through the house, and felt a quivering throb run through him at the sight of the brutes who had fallen back into their drunken slumbers. He brought him out to the cab, and said hoarsely to Selina, "Is this the child?"

"That's him, sir! That's him!" said Selina, holding out her hands for him; and the tears of joy trickled down her rugged cheeks.

Sir Tancred gave him to her, bade the cab-man drive to the Hotel Cecil, and got into the cab.

Selina had untied the brown-paper parcel, and was putting a little coat on the child. "I took the liberty of getting it to bring him away, in case you should let me have charge of him," she said.

The child still panted, but most of the terror had faded from his eyes; he had recognised his friend. Sir Tancred looked at him hungrily; his soul, so long starved, was feasting on the sight of that atom of humanity, so grimy, so shocking to the eye, but his own child.

"They call you Hildebrand Anne, do they?" he said with a broken, joyful laugh. "Tinker's the name for you!"

CHAPTER THREE

TINKER ACCEPTS HIS NAME

The child sat very still on Selina's lap, shrinking back as far as possible from Sir Tancred. Selina kept talking to him, and his father spoke to him several times, but he uttered never a sound. Once when Sir Tancred moved suddenly, he

threw up his little thin arm to guard his face; and Sir Tancred swore.

They agreed that he would be happier if they took no notice of him for a while, and sat quiet. He seemed relieved, for he sank into an easier position on Selina's lap, and presently they saw him stroke his coat with a caressing gesture, as though its softness pleased him. After a long while, he sat up, looked at the horse, said in a quaint, thin whisper, "Gee-gee—mine like gee-gee"; and then looked swiftly round with frightened eyes, fearful lest he had drawn attention to his existence.

Suddenly he began to blink, then, lulled by the motion of the cab, he fell asleep. They sat quiet, and had reached a more civilised part of London, when Sir Tancred said, "Do you think I could hold him without waking him?"

Selina nodded, and lifted him into his arms, and so they came to the Hotel Cecil.

When the cab stopped, the child awoke frightened, and at once began to struggle. Sir Tancred handed him over to Selina, who soothed him, and carried him to the lift. As soon as they were in his rooms, Sir Tancred rang for a waiter, and when he came, bade him bring up bread and hot milk at once. The child heard the words and said plaintively, "Mine hungry! Mine hungry!"

"All right, my lamb," said Selina. "You shall have dinner very soon."

When the waiter brought the bread and milk, Selina prepared it, and sat down at the table with the child on her knee. In a flash his grimy little hands were in the basin, and he was thrusting the bread and milk into his mouth with both of them. Selina pushed the bowl out of his reach, and fed him with a spoon, very slowly, nor did she give him much. Sir Tancred watched his ravenous eating with a constricted heart. When she had given him as much as she thought good for him, Selina put the bowl out of sight. The look of supreme content on his little face was even more pathetic in its extravagance than his ravenous hunger. He curled himself up on Selina's lap, surveyed the room for a while with drowsy eyes, and fell asleep.

Sir Tancred opened the note from Lord Crosland, which he had left unheeded on the table; it ran:

"DEAR BEAULEIGH:

"I have moved myself and my belongings to 411 and 412, till you have got things arranged. I'm off to Lord's for the day, but shall dine at the Cecil. Let us dine together.

"Yours sincerely,
"CROSLAND."

Sir Tancred felt relieved, and grateful for Lord Crosland's thoughtfulness.

"We shall be able to have these rooms to ourselves," he said to Selina.

"Yes, sir," said Selina. "And he'll want some clothes. When he's had a little sleep, and I've given him a bath, I'd better go out and get some."

"No: I'll go now myself," said Sir Tancred. "Then, when he's had his bath, they'll be ready for him."

He hurried down into a cab, and drove to Swan & Edgar's. There he bought the finest little vests and petticoat and frocks and socks and coats they could find him. On his way back with his purchases he remembered shoes, stopped the cab at the boot-maker's, and bought a dozen pairs. When he came back to his rooms, followed by two waiters loaded with parcels, he heard a splashing in the bathroom, and when they had set down their loads and were gone, Selina came to him and said, "I should like you to come and look at him, sir."

She had been crying.

Sir Tancred went into the bathroom, and found Hildebrand Anne splashing in the bath: "Hallo, Tinker," he said cheerfully, and turned sick at the sight of the wales and bruises about the thin little body.

"Look at that, sir," said Selina fiercely; and she touched the worst of them.

The child winced at her touch, gentle as it was, and said in his quaint, thin voice, "Halbut did do that. Mine not like Halbut. No: mine not like Halbut." And he shook his little head vigorously.

Sir Tancred groaned, and wished with all his heart that he had taken

advantage of his brief meeting with Halbut to give him a sound thrashing. Then he thought with a vindictive satisfaction how bitterly the brute would feel the loss of liquors consequent upon the loss of his income. He went out, rang for a waiter, and bade him send for a doctor.

When the doctor came he examined the bruises, and felt all the tiny bones carefully. He declared that none of them were broken and that, in spite of having been starved, the child was sound and healthy. The moment the doctor's grip on him loosed, Tinker wriggled off his knee and fled to Selina, who carried him away along with a selection from the parcels to dress him.

"A bad case," said the doctor. "But I've seen worse, much worse. I hope you'll put the matter into the hands of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and have the parents prosecuted—picked him up in the gutter I suppose."

"I haven't made up my mind about prosecuting them," said Sir Tancred.

"Oh, have them prosecuted! Have them prosecuted! It stops others," said the doctor. "And besides, they might get the cat: it's the only thing brutes of this kind understand." Then he added thoughtfully, "There's one uncommon thing about this child—quite uncommon."

"What's that?"

"His vitality—he ought to be in bed, half-dying, with those bruises, and starved as he is. But you saw how he struggled to get away from me. Well, I'll write you a prescription for as strong a tonic as I dare give a child."

He wrote the prescription, promised to be round every morning, and took his fee. As he went away he said, "Someone ought to get six month's hard labour for maltreating him."

After a while Selina brought in Tinker, dressed in his new clothes, with his mat of hair cut close to his head. He was still grimy—many baths were yet needed before he would be clean; but Sir Tancred saw that, once clean, and his peaked face filled out a little, he would be a very pretty baby. His features were fine, his eyes of a deep blue, his head was small and well-shaped, and the close-cut hair clustered about it in little curls.

He clung to Selina's gown, and Sir Tancred bade her sit down, and see what he would do. It was a long time before he stirred from her side, and then only a little way, moving with a curious, stealthy gait, casting fearful glances at Sir Tancred. He was attracted by the bright stuffs which covered the furniture, and went from piece to piece, stroking it. Then he saw himself in the unnecessarily mirrored door of the sideboard, and surveyed his image with an almost excited curiosity, and, it almost seemed, approbation.

He surveyed himself with an excited curiosity.

[Illustration: He surveyed himself with an excited curiosity.]

An idea struck Sir Tancred; he went out, took a cab, came back with an armful of toys, and set them in the middle of the room. The child stared and stared at them with great eyes. After a long while, in his stealthy, timid way, he made a few steps towards them, and scuttled back to Selina. He sallied out again, came nearer to them, and fled back. In the fourth attempt he carried off a little horse, and escaped with it behind the sofa. There he played with it, or rather sat hugging it, stroking it, or fingering it, in a dead silence. Sir Tancred watched his every movement, his every expression, missing nothing; his eyes could not have enough of him.

Twice again Selina fed him, and twice he was again ravenous. At half-past six she put him to bed.

Sir Tancred dressed for dinner, made arrangements for the feeding of Selina, and went into the smoking-room. There Lord Crosland found him, and they dined together. After dinner Lord Crosland pressed him to go to a theatre or a music-hall; but Sir Tancred would not: the discoveries of the day had left him no heart for amusement. He saw Lord Crosland set out in search of diversion; came back to his room, and sent Selina to her supper, while he watched over the child. He sat by the window, looking up the river, and smoking, in an unhappy reverie. Now and again he went and looked long at his sleeping boy.

When Selina came up from her supper he heard for the first time the story of his wife's death, and received her last message, which had been so long delivering. It was no little comfort to him in this revival of sorrow to hear that she had learned of the accident which prevented him from coming to her, and, sure of their ultimate meeting, had come to bear patiently their separation. And the knowledge that she must die without seeing him again had come to her in the merciful and indifferent weariness so often the forerunner of death.

When he had heard, and heard again, all that Selina could tell him, he gave her a cheque for five hundred pounds, putting aside her protestations that she had never looked for it, and would rather not have it, with the declaration that he had actually written out the advertisement offering that reward for information about his missing child, when she had brought it.

Long after she had gone to bed, he sat thinking over her story, immersed in unhappy memories and unavailing regrets, and his bitterness against his stepmother and uncle grew and grew in him at the ill treatment his child had endured through their interference and neglect, to a strength to which his own wrongs had never brought it.

The suppression and ignoring of Selina's last letters was inexplicable to him; he could only suppose that his stepmother had burnt them on reading only the signature; or had believed them to be the misrepresentations of a person trying to supplant Mrs. Bostock. He thought for a while of writing to his stepmother out of the fulness of his heart; and then he told himself that it was no use. At last he went heavily to bed. Three times in the night he awoke, and went and listened at the door of the boy's bedroom; there was no sound; he was sleeping peacefully.

After his morning bath Tinker looked a shade less grimy, and even the few meals he had enjoyed since his rescue had filled out his face a little. About eleven it was decided that a walk in the Embankment gardens would be good for him, and Selina carried him out. But it was very soon plain that it was anything but good for him. Every passer-by thrilled him with a fresh terror; in three minutes he clung to Selina panting and gasping with fright, his little fingers gripping her with a convulsive clutch, his eyes starting out of his head, but all in a terrible silence. It was appalling to see such an extremity of emotion not dare to find a vocal expression. Quickly they perceived that there was no reassuring or soothing him; Sir Tancred blindfolded him with his handkerchief, took him from Selina, and carried him quickly back to the hotel. He sat on Selina's lap, recovering very slowly, for nearly an hour. Then he got to his toys.

That afternoon Sir Tancred made a search, and discovered a staircase leading up to the roof. It was somewhat besprent with blacks; but there the child could take an airing, unterrified, in a solitude *à trois*, and in a very fresh air, when a south or west wind blew.

By the afternoon of the next day he had grown used to Sir Tancred, and, when he was tired of his silent play with his toys, would sit on his knee in perfect content. The skin of his face was almost white; now only his knees were really grimy.

On the evening of the fourth day, as he was having his supper, eating it with much less of the ravenous fervour of a wolf in winter-time, Sir Tancred distinctly

saw him smile; it was very faint, but it was an undoubted smile.

Three mornings later Sir Tancred was lying awake, when his door was pushed wider open, and Tinker stole in:

"Hallo, Tinker! Come here! You'll catch cold! What are you looking for?" said Sir Tancred.

"Gee-gee," said Tinker.

"Come here, and get warm."

After a little thought Tinker accepted the invitation, and Sir Tancred lifted him into bed. He huddled up to Sir Tancred, and presently found that his unshaven chin was rough, and stroked it with some wonder.

"You *are* a funny little Tinker," said Sir Tancred fondly.

"Mine Tinker. Mine Tinker!" said the child with a faint crow.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE TRAINING OF TINKER

Sir Tancred had a very sound theory that the air of London is as healthy an air as can be breathed in England; but for all that Tinker enjoyed the best quality of that air, on the roof of the Hotel Cecil, varied by the ozone of Brighton and the air of many parts of the country, it was many a long day before he showed a real tendency towards sturdiness, and outgrew the effects of his privations. He was long, too, outgrowing his terror of strangers.

Meanwhile Sir Tancred was trying to slake his intolerable thirst for distraction, distraction from his memories and regrets, in that section of London Society which, let us hope, cannot see itself for its own brilliancy, or hear itself for its own noise, that curious collection of Princes and millionaires, aristocrats and tradesmen, great ladies and upper Bohemians, about which the only fitting

thing is its title, found for it by some inspired journalist, of the Smart Set. There, where life forever bubbles a cheap and exceedingly dry champagne of a very doubtful exhilaration, he did now and again find a poor respite from regret till time blunted the edge of his sorrows. And when his sorrow was no longer acute, he had formed a reckless and extravagant habit of life from which, even when the reason for it had passed, he never sought to free himself: indeed, it never occurred to him to try.

But he never let his effort to drown his sorrow in the whirlpool of this strenuous life of pleasure interfere with his care of his little son; in truth, Tinker's society was his chief relaxation from the laborious and exacting round. Wherever he might be, in London, Paris, Vienna, Monte Carlo, or a country-house, Tinker was at hand, in his hotel, or lodged in the neighbourhood under the care of the faithful Selina.

A singularly early riser for one who sojourns in the Polite, or, to be exact, the Impolite World,—even in London he breakfasted at ten,—Sir Tancred was able to devote two or three hours every morning to the child before the serious and exacting pleasures of the day, and, before three years had passed, he had grown a veritable connoisseur in wooden bricks, tin soldiers, and composite animals. However late he returned at night, he never failed to look at Tinker in his cot in the room adjoining his bedroom, to assure himself that he was warm enough, or, if need were, lift him more comfortably on to his pillow. He watched him in his childish complaints with more care than the careful nurses he paid to watch him, or even than the fond and faithful Selina. And yet he did not spoil him.

Till Tinker was six years old they were playmates. Then, little by little, Sir Tancred found himself drifting into the position of general instructor, and after a while began to give serious thought to the matter. It was not, perhaps, a sound education that he gave the child. The classical side of it and the commercial were alike neglected; the historical was forgotten. The spelling was weak, and the handwriting was very bad. But, riding, fencing, and boxing were very carefully cultivated, with the result that Tinker, though he lacked the lumps of muscle which disfigured that eminent ancient, might very well have vied in strength and agility with the child Hercules.

In the matter of languages, by dint of spending some of each year in the different European capitals, he learned to speak better French than he did English, for his father enjoyed far better society on the Continent than he did in

London. In the same way, by sojourning in the land, he learned to make himself understood in German; and two months at Rome gave him a fair Italian. It must be admitted that he was as bad at spelling in all three of those languages as he was in his own. Again, his geography was hardly of the ornamental kind; he was entirely and happily ignorant of the whereabouts of Leeds and Crim Tartary; it is doubtful whether the Balearic Isles, which most boys of the Western World could point you out on a map, were even a name to him. But by the time he was ten he could so deal with continental or English Bradshaw that in five or six minutes he could tell you the quickest or the most comfortable way of reaching any town in which a self-respecting person would care to find himself, and his knowledge of steamer-routes and the Great American railways was no less sound.

Besides these accomplishments he was acquiring a wide knowledge of the world. By his eleventh birthday, though inexperienced in Lestrygons and Lotos-eaters, he had seen the cities of more men than that way-worn wanderer Ulysses at the end of his voyages, and he had no mean understanding of their disposition. Besides, as the years went on, Sir Tancred's debts increased. To live the really strenuous London life, you need a great deal of money; and though Fortune, so cruel to him in love, was kind at Bridge, her kindness was not continuous; and sometimes the ungracious importunities of his creditors drove him into retirement in the country. During these times of exile Tinker was, for the most part, his only companion, save for brief visits from Lord Crosland; and since Sir Tancred made a point of talking to him as his equal in age and experience, he gained from these times of close intimacy a yet wider knowledge of the world. These retirements never lasted long, not long enough indeed for Tinker, who was always happy enough in the country. Sir Tancred after a while grew impatient for the distractions of which he had acquired so deep-rooted a habit. Moreover, in the country, out of a well-filled country house or shooting-box, he might at any time fall into the old, sorrowful brooding on his lost happiness.

The most uncommon part of Tinker's education was the careful cultivation of his faculty of observation. Sir Tancred himself had a natural gift of understanding his fellow-creatures, which, along with his finer brain, little by little placed him in the noble but unenviable position of being the first person to whom his friends flew to be extricated from their scrapes. He had found that his gift stood him in such good stead in his varying fortunes that he spared no pains to equip Tinker with the faculty even more finely developed.

In forming Tinker's manners he was at once aided and hindered by many women. The faithful Selina, with all the best-hearted intentions in the world of spoiling the child, was foiled, partly by Sir Tancred's watchfulness, and partly by the uncertainty of her own temper. She was liable to the sudden, gusty rages of her class; and one of these rages undid the harm of many days' indulgence. When, however, Tinker was nine, she resigned with many misgivings, tears, and upbraidings of conscience, her charge of him, to marry a middle-aged Parisian hairdresser of Scotch nationality and the name of Angus McNeill. Sir Tancred had far more trouble with the women who fell in love with him; and many women fell in love with him or thought themselves in love with him, for his handsome, melancholy face, his reputation for recklessness, and above all for his cold insensibility to their charm. In ten years of the strenuous, smart life, his name was never coupled with that of any woman. All and each of these made a pet of Tinker, since they found it the surest way to abate his father's coldness. On the other hand the great ladies of the Faubourg de St. Germain petted him because his seraph's face and delightful manners charmed them; while any nice woman petted him because she could not help it.

Fortunately Tinker did not like being petted; his sentiments, indeed, on the matter of being kissed by the effusive verged on the ungallant. He liked to be a nice woman's familiar friend; his attitude toward her could be almost avuncular; but if a woman would pet him, he endured it with the exquisite patience with which his father forever taught him to treat the sex. In weaker hands than those of his father, he would doubtless have become a precocious and irritating monkey, always and painfully in evidence. But Sir Tancred and his creditors saw to it that his life in the world was broken by spells of healthy, boyish life, and he remained modest enough and simple-hearted.

As to his nerves, though they were always high-strung, the effects of his cruel treatment as a baby wore little by little and slowly away, until there was left only a faint dread, or rather dislike, of being alone in the dark, and a tendency to awake once in a month or so, crying out from a bad dream.

CHAPTER FIVE

TINKER'S BIRTHDAY BLOODHOUND

Hildebrand Anne came out of the long glass doors of the morning room of the Refuge, as Sir Tancred had happily named the cottage at Farndon-Pryze, which he had bought soon after Jeddah won the Derby at a hundred to one, and whither he retired when he was at loggerheads with Fortune, or Hildebrand Anne began to look fagged by London life. His father was reading a newspaper at the end of the lawn, and he walked across to him.

Sir Tancred looked up from his paper, and said with a sigh:

"I'm afraid there's no birthday present for you, Tinker."

"That's all right, sir," said Tinker cheerfully.

Father and son made an admirable pair, a pair of an extraordinary distinction. Reckless pride and sorrow had impressed on Sir Tancred's dark, sombre face much of the look of Lucifer, Son of the Morning; Tinker was very fair with close-cropped golden curls clustering round his small head, features as finely cut as those of his father, sunny blue eyes, lips curved like Cupid's bow, and the air of a seraph. The name had clung to him from its perfect inappropriateness. A tinker is but a gritty sight, and Hildebrand Anne had grown up, to the eye, an angel child, of a cleanliness uncanny in a small boy.

"Even if there were anything to buy in Farndon-Pryze, our fortunes are at a low ebb," said Sir Tancred with faint sorrow.

Tinker heaved a sympathetic sigh, and said again, "Oh, that's all right, sir."

"And the papers offer no suggestions for a new campaign," and Sir Tancred, looking with some contempt at the score of grey, pink, yellow, and green sheets which littered the grass around his long cane chair, fanned himself with his panama; for, though the month was May, the morning was hot.

"We shall have lots of money soon," said Tinker cheerily.

"Well, I hope so. It is no use my reading these wretched rags, unless they put me in the way of a coup."

"We always do," said Tinker with conviction; and he strolled away, pondering

idly the question of riches.

From the end of the garden of the Refuge, Tinker scanned the country round with dissatisfied eyes. None of the low hills was hollowed by a pirates', or brigands', or even a smugglers' cave with its buried hoard, no ruin tottered above a secret treasure-chamber. For himself he did not mind; it was all one to him whether he hunted his prey in the Champs Elysées or the long, straggling street of Farndon-Pryze. There were men in both places; and, though the methods of enraging them were different, they grew crimson to much the same fieriness. He found, indeed, an angry Frenchman more entertaining than an angry Englishman, but he was no epicure in sensations: only, he liked them exciting. But he would fain have discovered treasure for the sake of his father who, as he well knew, did not find in Farndon-Pryze the entertainment which satisfied his simpler, boyish heart.

As he scanned the unsatisfactory landscape, he heard the sound of hoofs, and looking round, saw James Alloway, a young farmer of the neighbourhood, riding along the highway. His face brightened; the coast was clear; it was the very morning to play toreador. In a breath he was through the hedge, and on the way to the village. He approached it after the manner of a red Indian, only pausing to cut a switch from a hedge. He had a score to settle with Josiah Wilby, a boy whose talebearing had procured him his last, well-earned whacking. Fortune favoured him: he spied his prey playing in careless security with two other boys on the village green; crept between two cottages; and was out on him or ever he was aware of the coming of an avenger. At the sight of Tinker, Josiah bolted for home; but he had not gone twenty yards before the stinging switch was curling round him. He ran the harder, howling and roaring; and Tinker accompanied him to the door of his father's cottage. As the roaring Josiah rushed in, the infuriated Mrs. Wilby rushed out, and Tinker withdrew. From a convenient distance, he raised his hat, and protested his regret at having had to instruct her son in the first principles of honour. Mrs. Wilby took his politeness as an insult, and with a rustic disregard of his pretty manners called him a limb, and threatened him with merciless punishment on the return of her husband. Tinker shrugged his shoulders, spread out his hands, gestures he had acquired in France, and hurried off on his main errand.

He came swiftly to a small field in which there browsed a large and solitary ram, by name Billy, Tinker's playfellow in the game of bull-fighting. With a somewhat unfair casting of the star part, Tinker always played the matador, Billy

played the bull.

Drawing a stout wooden sword, the handiwork of Sir Tancred, who never dreamed of the purpose it served, from its hiding-place in the hedge, Tinker slipped over the gate. Billy greeted his playfellow with an ill-conditioned grunt expressive of no joy at all. Tinker saluted, walked up to within ten yards, and waved his hat at him. Billy watched him with a wicked eye, affected to graze, and of a sudden charged with all his speed. Tinker sprang aside as the ram's head went down to butt, and as he hurtled past, prodded him with the sword behind the shoulder.

Billy pulled himself up as soon as he could check his momentum, and turned and stood blinking. Twice he rapped the ground hard with his forefoot. Tinker again drew to within ten yards of him; again Billy charged; and again he was prodded behind the shoulder. It was a beautiful game, and Tinker's lightness of foot, quickness of eye, and coolness of head did every credit to the education he had received from his father.

It was, indeed, a fine game, but as dangerous as it was fine; if Billy had once downed the boy, he would never have left him till he had ground the life out of him. This Tinker did not know, so that he did not draw all the excitement out of the game he would have done. It had grown more and more dangerous, also; for, by dint of playing it, Billy, who had started as a fat, clumsy, and sulky beast, had grown thin, nimble, and vicious. Alloway, indeed, often declared that he did not know what ailed the ram; his food never seemed to be doing him any good, and neither man, woman, nor child dare cross the field in which he browsed.

The game lasted some twenty minutes; and Tinker's skill, sureness, and lightness of movement was the prettiest sight. Sometimes, with a snorting bleat, Billy would turn sharply at the end of his charge, and charge again; then the concentration on the matter in hand, which his father had so carefully cultivated in Tinker, proved a most fortunate possession: he was never caught off his guard. But he was beginning to think that he had had enough of it, and Billy was sure that he had, when there came a roar from the road, and there sat Alloway on his horse. Or rather, he was no longer sitting on his horse, he was throwing himself off it.

Without one word of thanks to his playfellow for the pleasant game he had enjoyed with him, Tinker bolted for the further hedge, Billy after him, and

Alloway after both. Tinker knew the ground, ran for a post and rails which filled a gap, and skipped over them a few yards ahead of his energetic playfellow, who stood gazing after him with a rueful vindictiveness. Alloway came rushing up, and took no heed of the disappointed ram, who butted his right leg against the rails with great promptitude and violence. Alloway emulated his violence not only in his language, but by cutting him as hard as he could with the whip he carried, and rushed on after Tinker. Tinker could run at an admirable pace for a boy of eleven, and he was used to keeping it up longer than the rustic wind would last. But Alloway was brisker than a farm hand, or a keeper, and at the end of a couple of fields he began to gain. Tinker was soon aware of the painful fact, and knew that retribution was on him. But, though he could not escape, he could postpone; and his quick mind leaped to the fact that the more done Alloway was, the less vigorously would he ply his whip; besides, there was a chance that he might suddenly collapse.

At the entrance to the village there was a bare fifty yards between them. As he came up to the smithy, Blazer, the blacksmith's dog, the terror of the village, began to bark; and Tinker's saving idea came to him. He ran into the yard, and walked quietly up to Blazer, who barked and strained at his chain with every advertisement of savage fury. Tinker knew a good deal about dogs; he came quietly up to him, and tried to pat his head. Blazer caught at the hand, and Tinker left it passive in his teeth. Blazer's teeth bruised the skin, but did not pierce: and suddenly he realised that he did not know what to do with it.

With a sheepish air he let it go, and resumed his barking. Tinker stepped right up to his kennel, and the barking Blazer danced about him in an agony of indecision. Alloway rushed into the yard, and crying, "I've got you, you young devil! Have I?" made for Tinker.

Blazer saw a happy way out of his awkward uncertainty, and bit Alloway's leg.

Alloway jumped back with a roar; and, lashing at Blazer, hopped about.

The blacksmith ran out of the smithy, and took in the situation at a glance.

"Take away your dog, Green! Take him away!" shouted Alloway. "I'm going to warm the young gentleman's jacket! He's been worriting my ram!"

Alloway was a good customer; but Tinker was a familiar friend, and the

astute blacksmith scratched his head at great length before he said slowly, "If zo be as you've 'it Blaazer, you'll 'av ter tak 'im away yoursel'. I dussn't go near 'im; no, not wuz it ever so."

"I'm going to larrup the young limb!" cried Alloway obstinately.

"You'll 'ave to wait, then, till Blaazer gits quiet. I dussn't meddle with 'im; an' I'm shoeing Mr. 'Utton's graay maare." And with a natural, untrained diplomacy the blacksmith retired quickly into the smithy.

For a minute or two Alloway cursed and Blazer barked. Then Tinker sat quietly down on the threshold of the kennel, and fanned himself with his hat. The empurpled Alloway grew purpler at the sight of a coolness he did not share.

"You young rip!" he roared, dancing lightly in his exasperation, "I'll larrup you if I stay here till to-morrow morning!"

"If you're speaking to me, Mr. Alloway, you needn't speak so loud. I'm not deaf," said Tinker with gentle severity.

Mr. Alloway in his violent, rustic way, uttered a good many remarks quite unfit for boyish ears.

Tinker paid no heed to him, but chirruped to Blazer, who came to him in a wondering sulkiness, and with many protesting growls suffered himself to be patted. Alloway put his hands in his pockets, and stood stolidly with his legs wide apart, a picture of florid manliness and grim, but whiskered determination. Some small boys, heavy with their midday meal, came to the gate of the yard, and in an idle repletion exhausted themselves in conjectures as to the true inwardness of Tinker's relation with Blazer, and Alloway's absorption in it. Twice the blacksmith came to the smithy door, and a large, slow grin spread painfully over his bovine face.

Tinker continued to pet Blazer till the surprised and mollified dog sat down between his feet, and put his head on his knee. Then Tinker began to apply that power of concentration in which he had been trained by his father to the discovery of a method of final escape. Presently Alloway went to the gate, and, climbing onto it, sat waiting for his triumph in a stubborn doggedness.

After a while Tinker said gently, "That's a good horse you ride, Mr. Alloway."

The farmer said nothing.

"He's young, isn't he?" said Tinker.

An acute and scornful expression of "You don't get round me!" filled all of the farmer's face that was not covered with whiskers.

"Did you think to tie him up before you ran after me?" said Tinker earnestly.

Alloway sprang from the gate as though a very sharp nail had of a sudden sprouted up immediately beneath him, slapped his thigh, and stood shaking his whip at Tinker with expressive, but starting eyes.

"I dare say he's out of the county by now," said Tinker thoughtfully.

"You young blackguard!" said Alloway, and stepped towards the kennel. Blazer shot out to the length of his chain; and Alloway, in his fury, cut him savagely with his whip. Blazer roared rather than barked; the noise stimulated Tinker's wits; and he saw his way.

Alloway recovered himself sufficiently to say with choking emphasis, "Horse, or no horse, you don't get me to leave here!" and went back to the gate.

Tinker let him climb on it, and then he said gently, "Have you ever played at being a runaway slave hunted by bloodhounds, Mr. Alloway?"

Alloway scowled at him most malignantly.

"I should think it would be quite an exciting game. It doesn't really matter that Blazer's only a bull terrier; we can call him a bloodhound, you know," Tinker went on, looking at the dog a little regretfully.

Alloway, coddling his fury, scarcely heard him.

"I'll be the slave-owner," said Tinker, fumbling with the chain.

It came out of the staple; and Alloway roared, "What are you doing, you young rascal?"

"Oh, it's all right," said Tinker. "Don't be frightened; I'll keep him on leash till

you get a good lead."

Alloway jumped down from the gate, on the other side of it, his anger changed to uncertainty spiced with discomfort.

Blazer felt the chain loosen, and darted forward, jerking Tinker after him.

"I can't hold him!" yelled Tinker.

"I can't hold him!"

[Illustration: "I can't hold him!"]

Alloway turned, dropped his whip, and bolted up through the village.

Blazer dashed at the gate, clawing it; Tinker got a better grip on the chain, opened the gate, snatched up the whip as Blazer jerked him through; and they set off down the road after Alloway. The farmer ran better than ever, faster than he had run after Tinker, faster, probably, than he had ever run before in his life.

Blazer, though Tinker dragged for all he was worth, made a very fair pace after him. But by the time they were a hundred yards beyond the village, the throttling drag began to tell; Blazer slowed down; and Alloway, still going hard, disappeared round the corner.

Blazer and Tinker fell into a walk, and then stopped.

Sir Tancred Beauleigh, on his quiet way to the village post-office, was surprised at being nearly knocked down by one of the most respectable young farmers of the neighbourhood, who was running with the speed and face of a man pursued by all the tigers of Bengal. A hundred yards further on he heard yells and screams, and shouts of laughter; and coming round a corner, he saw a small boy rolling in recurring paroxysms of joy on the grass by the roadside, watched by a puzzled bull-terrier. He had no difficulty in connecting them with the flying farmer.

He came up to the absorbed pair unnoticed, and standing over them, said quietly, "What's the joke, Tinker?"

Tinker sprang to his feet, and wiping away the joyful tears, said, "I have been

playing at hunting runaway slaves."

"Ah, Alloway was the slave?" said Sir Tancred.

"Yes, sir," said Tinker.

Sir Tancred dropped the subject; he knew by experience that the truth might be painful hearing, and that he would probably hear it from Tinker's flying partner in the game quite soon enough.

"What are you doing with that dog?" he said.

"I borrowed him," said Tinker.

Sir Tancred looked Blazer carefully over. "He's a very good dog," he said. "How would you like him for a birthday present?"

Tinker's eyes shone as a long vista of scrapes, out of which Blazer's teeth might help him, opened before his mind.

"Ever so much!" he said quickly.

"Come on, then, we'll go and try to buy him." And they set out for the village.

Mr. Green stood in the door of the smithy, and grinned enormously at the sight of the returning Tinker. Sir Tancred said, "Good-morning, Green; do you care to sell this dog? I'll give you three pounds for him."

Mr. Green said, "Three pound," and stared helplessly at the cottages opposite, confused by the need to assimilate, on the spur of the moment, a new idea.

"Three pounds?" said Tinker quickly. "Why, he only cost fifteen shillings a year ago!"

"An orfer is an orfer!" said Mr. Green quickly, his wits spurred at the sudden prospect of a lowering of the price. "And I takes it."

As he led away Blazer, with a new proprietary pride Tinker said firmly to Sir Tancred, "I shall go on considering him a bloodhound, sir."

CHAPTER SIX

THE RESCUE OF ELIZABETH KERNABY

Sir Tancred paused now and again in his leisurely breakfast to scowl across the dining room at Mr. Biggleswade, who, with his sour-looking wife and woebegone little girl, was breakfasting at an opposite table. The Royal Victoria Hotel was second-rate. The cooking was poor, the wine was bad, and Solesgate itself was dull. But these misfortunes Sir Tancred would have endured cheerfully because the place suited Hildebrand Anne, who had but lately recovered from an attack of scarlet fever at Farndon-Pryze, but he could not endure Mr. Biggleswade. It was not so much that he had reckoned up Mr. Biggleswade as a large, fat, greasy rogue, nor was it that no snub once and for all stopped Mr. Biggleswade from thrusting himself upon him with a snobbish obsequiousness; it was Mr. Biggleswade's noisy and haphazard methods of disposing of his food, which left small portions of each course nestling in his straggling beard, and filled the air with the sound of the feeding of pigs.

This Sir Tancred found unendurable, and the more unendurable that Mr. Biggleswade had made up his mind that he enjoyed his meals more in the presence of a baronet, and always waited for his coming.

Sir Tancred was eating his breakfast mournfully, therefore, reflecting on the unkindness of Fortune, who had afflicted Tinker with his fever at so inconvenient a time. For he had not been able to raise the money to take him to make his convalescence at one of the more expensive watering places, whither resort millionaires and the smart, whose fondness for games of chance and skill would have kept him in careless luxury. He had been driven to bring him to Solesgate, a town of six bathing-machines; and there the rest of his ready money dwindled to a few shillings. A sudden cessation of the sound of the feeding of pigs caught him from his mournful reflections. He looked up quickly, to see Mr. Biggleswade staring at his newspaper with a most striking expression of triumphant greed.

On the instant Sir Tancred filled with the liveliest interest; emotion, especially curious emotion, in his fellow creatures always aroused his interest,

and not infrequently brought him profit, and Mr. Biggleswade's emotion seemed to him curiously violent to be excited by the perusal of a newspaper. He made half a movement to show it to his wife, caught Sir Tancred's eye, and setting it down, went on hastily with his breakfast. He had not been so quick but that Sir Tancred had seen that the paper was *The Daily Telegraph*, and the exciting paragraph on the first page.

Sir Tancred brightened to the rest of his breakfast; he had little doubt that he was on the track of some roguery or other, and he promised himself a hunt through the paper till he found it. When the Biggleswades, having finished their breakfast, went down to the beach, he lighted a cigar, took his folding-chair and his pile of newspapers, and settled down sixty yards away from them. As he had expected, their first act was to discuss the newspaper with great animation, handing it backwards and forwards to one another. And he took *The Daily Telegraph* from his pile, and set about seeking the source of their excitement. He passed over the first advertisement in the agony column, the offer of a reward for the recovery of the stolen child of Kernaby, the Marmalade Millionaire, merely noting that it had been raised to 4000 pounds, and came to the conclusion that the second advertisement was genuine, while the third, which set forth at great length the woes of a young woman parted from a young man, seemed to him to read like thieves communicating. He had begun to eliminate the superfluous words, when Tinker, with Blazer, his bull-terrier, came suddenly up to him from behind, and bade him good-morning.

Tinker had breakfasted some three hours earlier, probably in the hotel kitchen, for, as was his invariable custom, he was on the best of terms with the servants; and for all that he had spent the intervening hours on the uncovered slimy rocks, was in his usual state of spotless cleanliness. He is the one living boy to whom dirt does not cling.

"How have you been amusing yourself?" said his father, his stern face lighting up with a delightful smile.

"I'm still teaching Blazer to be a bloodhound. He's slow—very slow."

Blazer cocked an apologetic ear and sniffed.

"It must be tiring work."

"Yes," said Tinker sadly, and his eyes wandered slowly along the shore.

Sir Tancred flipped the ash off his cigar.

"Those Biggleswades are beasts!" Tinker broke out suddenly when his eyes fell on them. "They treat that little girl of theirs shamefully! When I went to bed last night she was crying again. She always is. I don't believe she's their little girl at all. I believe they've stolen her."

"The deuce!" cried Sir Tancred, and catching up his *Daily Telegraph*, he read again the Marmalade Millionaire's advertisement. It ran:

4000 POUND REWARD. 4000 POUND REWARD. 4000 POUND REWARD.

The above sum will be paid to any person giving information leading to the recovery of Elizabeth E. Kernaby, aged seven years. She strayed or was stolen in Kensington Gardens between the hours of 10 and 11 a. m., on the 19th ultimo. She is fair with blue eyes, and long flaxen hair, speaks with a lisp, and answers to the name of Bessie. Any person bringing information to Messrs. Datchett & Hobb's, 127, Lincoln's Inn Fields, or to Mr. Joseph W. Kernaby, 11a, Cadogan Square, will receive:

4000 POUND REWARD. 4000 POUND REWARD. 4000 POUND REWARD.

He laid the paper on his knee, and began to consider the facts of the kidnapping, as he remembered them from the newspaper reports. Her nurse had taken her to Kensington Gardens, where she had foregathered with the little daughters of Sir William Uglow. The children's play had little by little drawn them away from their gossiping nurses, right out of their sight; and when their nurses went to look for them they found only the little Uglovs; Elizabeth Kernaby had gone. The children said that a tall gentleman had come to them and, telling her that her mamma had sent him for her, had taken her away in a cab. The nurse had thought it strange, but suspected nothing wrong till she reached home and found that Elizabeth had not returned. She did not return; and since that day, in spite of all the efforts of Scotland Yard and the private-detective agencies, nothing had been seen or heard of her. The reward offered for her recovery had risen from 1000 pounds to 4000 pounds.

It had been a crime of a masterly simplicity, and Sir Tancred had been sure that the child would not be forthcoming till the reward satisfied the cupidity of the child-stealers. He had reason to believe that the present reward did satisfy the

cupidity of the child-stealers; and after a thoughtful glance at the Biggleswades, he turned to Tinker. Tinker could be of help to him.

He turned to him and said:

"Do you remember my telling you of a little girl, Elizabeth Kernaby, who was stolen a week or two ago?"

"Elizabeth Kernaby, aged seven, blue eyes, long flaxen hair, speaks with a lisp, and answers to the name of Bessie," said Tinker glibly, in the manner of one reciting a lesson.

"Quite right," said Sir Tancred approvingly; "you'll be another Sherlock Holmes some day. Well, I have reason to believe that the little girl with the Biggleswades is Elizabeth Kernaby."

Tinker's face brightened. "Her eyes are blue, but her hair is black, and it's not very long."

"Hair can be dyed."

"Yes; and it doesn't match her face."

"It doesn't, doesn't it? Well, I want to know if she lisps, and if she answers to the name of Bessie. You will find out?"

"Yes, I'll find out. But Mrs. Biggleswade never lets her speak to anyone. I must think it out."

With that Tinker sat down; set his elbows on his knees, his chin on his hands; and plunged into deep thought. His father sat equally thoughtful; and their similar employment brought out extraordinarily their strong likeness, for all that Tinker was a fair, angel child, and his father's face as dark and proud and stern as Lucifer's.

For a long while neither said a word, nor moved. Sir Tancred was trying to see how to work the affair on seven shillings, and debating whether to call in the help of the police. Instinct assured him that he had no time to lose, no time to walk to Beachley and pawn his watch, that he must not lose sight of them, and in delicate matters he relied chiefly on instinct. Mr. Biggleswade would not have

looked so triumphant, had not the 4000 pound reward satisfied him; it seemed likely that he would leave for town that very day. On the other hand, Sir Tancred was averse to going to the police; he knew what the provincial police were. What was excellent evidence to him would seem no evidence at all to them; and they would move too late, or, if they moved in time, would muddle the whole business, and let the Biggleswades know they were suspected. Besides, it hurt his self-love to seek aid from anyone. No, the proper game was to rob the robbers, and he had seven shillings to play it with.

Suddenly Tinker stirred. "I'm going to try now," he said.

Sir Tancred looked at the Biggleswades. Mr. Biggleswade lay sprawled on his back, a handkerchief spread over his face; and mellowed by the distance, the music of a long-drawn snore murmured over the sands. Mrs. Biggleswade was nodding over a book.

Tinker rose, bade Blazer stay where he was; and walked off towards the hotel. Sir Tancred twisted round his chair, tore a hole in his *Daily Telegraph*, and watched him. Tinker fetched a circuit to within a hundred yards of the backs of the Biggleswades, threw his straw hat on the sand, dropped on to his stomach, and began to squirm along towards them, taking advantage of every ridge and hollow. It was a long business, but at last he lay in a hollow thirty yards away. He raised his head cautiously, and in a low, clear voice said, "Bessie."

The little girl sprang to her feet, and stared about her wildly. Tinker dropped his head and lay still. Mrs. Biggleswade, roused from her napping, caught the child by the arm, and shaking her, said savagely, "Sit down, you little brat! Keep quiet!"

The child sank down, and began to cry.

Tinker lay still for a while, and then began, to squirm away. When he reached his hat, he rose to his feet, knocked the sand off his clothes, and walked slowly back to his father.

"She answers to the name of Bessie, sir," he said quietly.

"Good!" said Sir Tancred, and he rose.

They walked down to the railway station; and on the way Sir Tancred

informed Tinker that he was to take Elizabeth Kernaby up to London, to 11a Cadogan Square, and, at a cost of six out of his seven shillings, bought two half third-class tickets. On their way back he learned, no less to his surprise than his joy, that Tinker was the possessor of eighteenpence. To make assurance surer, therefore, he bought a basket of strawberries, and when the Biggleswades returned to the hotel for lunch, they found the Beauleighs in the porch, eating them.

"Would you like some strawberries, little girl?" said Tinker as they passed, and he held out the basket to the child.

"Yeth, pleath," she said, and stepped forward to take one.

"No, no, Keziah," broke in Mrs. Biggleswade. "You know they don't agree with you!" And she caught her away, and hurried her into the hotel.

"Children like sweet things; but they sometimes don't agree with them," said Mr. Biggleswade sapiently, his loose and flabby bulk swelling yet bigger at the thought that he was speaking to a member of the aristocracy.

"That is very true," said Sir Tancred pleasantly.

Surprised by this affability, but swift to seize on a conversational opening with a baronet, Mr. Biggleswade stayed talking with him in the porch; he talked to him all lunch-time: and he talked to him on the sands after lunch. His unbridled appetite for the society of the aristocracy proved his undoing. For at a few minutes to three Sir Tancred proposed a stroll along the shore. They went slowly, Mr. Biggleswade rising to the great social occasion for which he had so long hankered, and proving himself, in his talk, a thorough man of the world.

As they passed round the promontory at the end of the little bay, and Sir Tancred took out his handkerchief, Tinker was awaiting the signal, impatient, but cool; and as they passed out of sight, he began to steal up behind the drowsy Mrs. Biggleswade and presently, touching the child on the shoulder, beckoned her to come with him.

She looked timidly at Mrs. Biggleswade whose eyes were closed, and rose. Tinker drew her quietly away. They had not gone twenty yards when a jerking nod awoke Mrs. Biggleswade, and she missed the child. She scrambled up, turned and saw her, and cried, "Come here, you naughty girl. Come here at

once!"

"Are you Bessie Kernaby?" said Tinker to the child.

"Yeth, yeth," she said, turning to go to her tyrant.

Tinker gripped her arm, and cried, "Pstt! Pstt! Hold her, Blazer! Hold her!" and waved him at Mrs. Biggleswade.

Blazer darted forward, growling with a fine show of teeth.

Mrs. Biggleswade, like a wise woman, stood stock-still, and sent a shrill scream ringing down the shore, and another, and another, and another.

Tinker caught Elizabeth's hand and cried, "Come on! Come on! We've only just time to catch the train!" And the two children set off running to the station.

On the edge of the sands Tinker stopped for a moment, whistled shrilly, brought Blazer racing after them, and ran on again. He could hear the far-away rattle of the express.

Mr. Biggleswade was too deeply engrossed in his talk with Sir Tancred to notice the first half-dozen screams from his wife; and they came faintly round the promontory. Then he heard them, said, "By Jove! that's Maria!" and started to run back. Sir Tancred ran by his side. When they came round the promontory they saw Mrs. Biggleswade waving frantically towards the station, and half-way to it two little figures running. Mr. Biggleswade showed himself a man of action. He swung round, and, with the swiftness of an accomplished boxer, dealt Sir Tancred an unexpected blow on the side of the head which knocked him over half-stunned, and almost in the same moment started to run after the children. He was half a mile from them, and they were less than a quarter of a mile from the station, but naturally he ran much faster.

As the children reached the platform the express steamed in. Tinker hurried his prize into an empty third-class carriage, in the forepart of the train, and pushed the ticketless Blazer under the seat. Then he put his head out of the window, and saw to his disgust Mr. Biggleswade, his coat-tails flying, two hundred yards from the station, yelling lustily, but making a very good pace indeed for his flabby bulk. The doors were shutting, and Tinker watched the guard breathlessly. When he whistled, Mr. Biggleswade had yet fifty yards to go.

At the sound he yelled louder than ever, and made a tremendous spurt. The train was well on the move when he rushed into the station; but he dashed at a compartment in the last carriage, wrenched the door open, scrambled on to the footboard, and tumbled in, amidst the shouts of the indignant porters.

Tinker drew in his head with a blank face. It had been no part of his father's plan that Mr. Biggleswade should travel by the same train to London, and his heart sank a little. But remembering Blazer, his spirits rose, and he turned to the little girl with a cheerful face. She was panting, crying, and wringing her hands in a paroxysm of nervous excitement. He sat down beside her, thumped her on the back—a way he had with tearful females—wiped away her tears with his handkerchief, and poured comforting assurances of safety into her ears.

He poured comforting assurances of safety into her ears.

[Illustration: He poured comforting assurances of safety into her ears.]

When at last he had soothed her he began to question her, and drew from her the story of her captivity. She had driven miles and miles with the gentleman who had fetched her from Kensington Gardens, to a little house in a long street. There she had found the Biggleswades. Mrs. Biggleswade had taken away her nice clothes, and dressed her in these common things. Then she had cut off her hair.

"I was wondering about your hair," interrupted Tinker.

For answer the little girl lifted up her black locks, hat and all; displayed a fuzzy little fair poll underneath them, and let them drop on it again.

"I see," said Tinker, and he went on with his questioning.

She had stayed with the Biggleswades, shut up in a room upstairs, she did not know how many days; and then they had come down to Solesgate. All the while Mrs. Biggleswade had been very unkind to her, and slapped her whenever she cried for her mother.

The remembrance of her misfortunes set her crying again, and again, with quiet patience, he consoled her. Presently she was babbling cheerfully of her home, her mother, and her dolls, and asking many questions. He made the replies politeness demanded, but he lent an abstracted ear to her talk, for he was considering different plans for escaping Mr. Biggleswade, most of them useless by reason of the slowness of Elizabeth. He could only make up his mind that they must dash for a cab as quickly as they could, and trust to Blazer for protection.

It seemed to him a very long journey; and even when he had made his plan, he found it no little task to take his part in the conversation. As the train ran into London, he told her that Mr. Biggleswade was in the train, and they must bolt for the cab. At once she was all panic and tears, and he had much ado to brace her for effort before the train slowed down at the terminus. Before it had stopped he was out of the carriage, helping her down. They ran towards the barrier; but the

platform was long, and Elizabeth was slow. While they were yet thirty yards from it, Mr. Biggleswade was on them. With a savage blow he sent Tinker flying, caught up the screaming Elizabeth, and dashed on, crying loudly, "The nearest hospital! The nearest hospital! My little girl! My little girl!"

Everyone made way for him; but Tinker picked himself up, bolted after him, hissing on Blazer, took a flying leap on to his back, and locked his arms round his neck in a strangling grip, as the prompt and nimble Blazer buried his teeth in his calf. Mr. Biggleswade dropped Elizabeth and tore viciously at Tinker's hands. The passengers and porters came crowding round, and the moment the throng was thick enough, Tinker dropped to his feet and gripped Elizabeth by the arm, shouting, "Police! Police!"

Mr. Biggleswade struggled to choke Blazer off his leg. A police inspector pushed through the crowd, and cried, "What's all this?"

"The young rascal has enticed away my little girl, and brought her up to London!" cried Mr. Biggleswade, who had divested himself of Blazer, and was holding him off by the collar; and with the other hand he grabbed at Elizabeth.

"It's a lie!" cried Tinker, as the inspector grasped his shoulder. "This is Elizabeth Kernaby! He stole her!" And on the words he jerked off her hat and wig.

At the sight of the fuzzy little bare poll light slowly dawned on the inspector; but even more quickly Mr. Biggleswade had seen that the game was up, flung Blazer away from him, and bolted through the barrier. The Inspector rushed after him; but Blazer, who apparently had not had enough of Mr. Biggleswade's calf, outstripped him, and pinned the fugitive on the very step of a hansom.

When Tinker and Elizabeth, escorted by an excited and applauding crowd, came out of the station they found Mr. Biggleswade, the inspector, two constables, and Blazer in a tangled, battling group. Tinker saw his chance of escaping any further aid from the police, thrust Elizabeth into a hansom, gave the cabman the address, whistled Blazer out of the fight, jumped in after her, and drove off amid the cheers of the crowd. By the time the dishevelled police had Mr. Biggleswade secured, and could turn their attention to them, the children were half a mile away.

Tinker's hands had been torn by the savage rascal, and on the way to Cadogan

Square he was busy staunching their bleeding. By tearing his handkerchief in two he managed with Elizabeth's aid to bandage both; but he was vexed that they must make such an unpleasant appearance before her relatives. When they reached Cadogan Square he paid the cabman, and rang the bell; but when the door opened, Elizabeth assumed the leadership. She caught Tinker's hand, dragged him past the astonished footman, hurried him up the stairs, and burst with him into a drawing room, where half a score of mournful people were discussing over their tea the further measures for her recovery.

"I've come back, mamma! And this is Hildebrand Anne Beauleigh, but his real name is Tinker!" cried Elizabeth.

In a breath Mrs. Kernaby had her in her arms; there were screams and pantings, and a bandying to and fro of smelling salts. Everyone was hugging Elizabeth, or shaking hands with Mr. Kernaby, or slapping one another on the back and assuring one another that they had always said so. Tinker watched their exuberance with some distaste, which redoubled when Elizabeth's tangled and incoherent tale drew upon him the embraces of half a dozen animated and highly scented ladies of the kind who haunt the houses of unprotected millionaires. When at last quiet was restored, he told his story, omitting as many of his own doings as were not absolutely necessary to make it clear, in a fear lest they should provoke another outburst of embraces.

When he had clearly grasped the fact that Tinker was the son of Sir Tancred Beauleigh, all the warm-heartedness of his native Drumtochty bubbled up in Mr. Joseph Kernaby; he shook him warmly by the hand, and cried:

"Mah mannie; eh, but you're a braw sonsie laddie; an' aiblins ye need it, nor yoursel' nor any o' your noble an' deesteengueeshed family shall ne'er ask the twice a wee bit bite or soop unner this humble roof."

Tinker, not having the Gaelic, was somewhat taken aback by the cryptic utterance; but an anxious-looking younger son of an embarrassed peer, who for a considerable consideration was bear-leading the millionaire through the social labyrinth, hurriedly interpreted it to him as a standing invitation to dinner. He thanked Mr. Kernaby, and begged that a telegram might at once be sent to his father, informing him of his success and safety.

"They tallygrams they yanners the saxpences, mah mannie," said the

millionaire with a falling face. "A poostcaird is a verra——"

But the anxious-looking younger son cut him short, said that it should be sent at once, and bade the footman charged with its despatch bring also a doctor to dress Tinker's wounded hands.

Meanwhile Sir Tancred, as soon as he learnt that Mr. Biggleswade had caught the express, had hurried hot-foot in a devouring anxiety to Beachley, where dwelt a pawnbroker, raised money, and caught there a train to town. When he reached Cadogan Square he found Tinker making an excellent tea after his exhausting labours, and giving an account of the Biggleswades to a detective from Scotland Yard. When he had heard Sir Tancred's story, too, the detective said that Mr. Biggleswade would get five years; and the event proved him right.

There was no getting away from the grateful Kernabys, but after the cooking of the Royal Victoria hotel Sir Tancred was more than ready for a good dinner. He found in his host and hostess a strong disposition to adopt Tinker forthwith; and before the end of dinner he found them no less inclined to adopt him, too. But it could not be.

After dinner, disregarding the faint expostulations of the anxious-looking younger son, the millionaire rose to his feet and pronounced a glowing, fervid, but, save for the couplet,

"The rank is but the guinea stamp
The maan's the maan for a' that"

unintelligible eulogy on the family of Beauleigh.

As he drove away with Tinker to the Hotel Cecil, Sir Tancred crinkled the millionaire's cheque in his waistcoat pocket, and said, "Four thousand pounds is a good day's work—two thousand for you—and two thousand for me. We'll move to Brighton. But I spent some of the most horrible hours of my life wondering if that beast had got into the same compartment with you. None of the fools at the station could tell me."

"I was afraid you'd be anxious, sir," said Tinker, patting his arm. "But I think that Blazer and I could have dealt with him."

Then he gave Blazer—who, distended by the fat of the land, was snoring

heavily through happy dreams of the human calf, at the bottom of the cab—a gentle kick, and said with sad severity, "I shall never make a real bloodhound of Blazer. Bloodhounds leap at a man's throat; they don't collar him by the leg."

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE STOLEN FLYING-MACHINE

"You vas a vonder-child!" said Herr Schlugst. "You know dat machine as good as me!" And his goggle eyes stared out of his round, good-natured face at Hildebrand Anne in a wondering admiration.

"Yes; I think I have got the hang of her," said Hildebrand Anne with some pride, looking up at the great cigar-shaped balloon which hung motionless in the still air.

"Vat for do dey call thee Tinkar? You vas not look like a tinkar; and you vas not haf—do not haf de tinkar brain."

"Well, I've been called Tinker ever since I can remember; and one name's as good as another," said Hildebrand Anne indifferently. "But you'll let me cross over to Paris with you to-morrow, won't you?"

"I vill not! I vill not! Dere is de danger! De great danger! We must vant de calm dat ees dead! I take no von vith me but mine own self! And I vas not vould go, not for nodings; but I vas vant de tousand pounds. Dere is my leetle girl to be lived and educate."

"But I do so want to be one of the first to cross the Channel in a flying-machine," said Tinker plaintively.

"Ach, to be vurst! to be vurst! Dat is you English top and toe! Do I vas hunt de orchid to be vurst discoverer? Not mooch. I hunt him for money. Do I cross de Channel in my machine to be vurst? Nein, nein. I cross him for de tousand pounds. And you I vould not take, no, not for de oder tousand pound. Bah! You

was not at all von vunder-child; you was von foolish! Good-night, mine young friend, good-night." And Herr Schlugst went into the galvanised iron hut where for the time being he lived, watching over his precious machine.

The Tinker came out of the palisade which surrounded it, and walked down the cliff into Brighton quite disconsolate; he could not see how to get his way. He came into the Paragon Hotel and dressed for dinner as sulky as a naturally cheerful soul could be. He showed no readiness to talk, and his father presently condoled with him on his lowness of spirits. Tinker said briefly that he had had a disappointment.

"Ah, they are terrible things, disappointments, when one is eleven years old," said Sir Tancred. "Later in life they lose their edge."

On his words there came into the dining room a rotund, middle-aged Jewish gentleman, coated with dust and wearing a harassed air.

"Look," said Sir Tancred, "that's Blumenruth, the Jungle millionaire."

The financier gazed gloomily round the room, looking for a table. At the sight of Sir Tancred, an idea seemed to strike him, his face brightened a little, and he came to them.

"How do you do, Sir Tancred Beauleigh?" he said, shaking hands warmly. "May I dine at your table? I want a word with you, a word which may be profitable to both of us."

"By all means," said Sir Tancred in the manner he always adopted towards profitable financiers of Hamburg extraction, a manner extremely condescending, without being offensive.

The financier sat down; smudged the dust across his face with a coloured silk handkerchief; and breathed heavily. Then he looked at Tinker as though he would like him sent away.

"Anything you may say before him will go no further," said Sir Tancred, quick to mark the meaning of the look. "Let me introduce you. Mr. Blumenruth, my son Hildebrand."

The financier bowed, but he still looked unhappy at Tinker's presence. A

waiter brought him some soup, and he began upon it hurriedly. Sir Tancred went on with his dinner in a tranquil indifference. The financier finished his soup: looked again at Tinker, and burst out: "Well, it can't make any difference! I want your help, Sir Tancred, and you're the one man in England who can help me; you're used to these things." And he smudged the dust on his face a little more.

Sir Tancred murmured politely, "Only too pleased."

"I must be in Paris either to-night or to-morrow morning for an hour's talk with Meyer before the Bourse opens. And I must leave England without anyone knowing I've left it. It may make a difference to me of—of a hundred thousand pounds."

"Pardon me," said Sir Tancred suavely. "I like my clients to be open with me. It will make a difference of ruin. The Cohens have you in a hole."

The millionaire gasped, "My goodness! how did you know? It means ruin—or—or I make a hundred thousand."

"I see," said Sir Tancred. "Well?"

"I left London quietly in a motor-car. Before I'd gone twenty miles, a racing Panhard, stuffed with private detectives—men I've sometimes employed myself"—he almost sobbed at the thought—"passed me; and another came up, and dropped back to a mile behind. They're here in Brighton. I'd given it up; I was going to dine here, sleep the night, and go back to London to fight it out—not that it's of any use unless I can see Meyer—when I saw you. I'll give—I'll give five thousand pounds to anyone who can get me across to Paris secretly. It's here—in my pocket." And he tapped his breast.

Sir Tancred thought earnestly for fully five minutes; then he said, "It can't be done."

"Don't say so! now don't," said the financier, "The money's here! Here!" and he again slapped his breast pocket.

"It's no use," said Sir Tancred. "I might smuggle you out of the hotel; but there isn't any sort of vessel, steamer, steam yacht, or launch to take you across."

"Let's go to Dover in my car!"

"What's the use? The detectives would follow in theirs."

The financier groaned, and some large tears ran down his face. He bent his head to hide them; and for all that he was not pleasant to look upon, Tinker felt sorry for him.

"Cheer up, man," said Sir Tancred. "You can always begin again!"

But the financier would not be heartened. He made a wretched dinner; after it he followed Sir Tancred into the billiard room, and steadily drinking brandies and sodas, watched him play pool. At eleven he went to bed. Tinker had gone to bed long before, but his door was just open, and he saw the financier go into his room. Five minutes later he stole across the corridor, and, without knocking, opened the door and went in. The financier was sitting at a table, gazing through a mist of tears at a nice, new nickel-plated revolver. He had no real intention of blowing his brains out, but with the childlike, emotional spirit of his race, he had persuaded himself that he had, and was luxuriating in his woe.

"What do you want?" he moaned.

"I've come to show you a way of getting to Paris," said Tinker, closing the door softly.

"Mein Gott!" cried the millionaire, relapsing into his vernacular in his excitement. "How? How?"

"By Herr Schlugst's flying-machine."

"A flying-machine! Is the boy mad?"

"No, I'm not. I've been with Herr Schlugst on three trial trips; and the last two he let me work it most of the time. It's as easy as winking, once you know how to do it, and he says I understand it as well as he does. It's all ready for the journey. We've only got to get into it without waking him; and he sleeps like a log."

"Mein Gott! Mein Gott! What a plan! I'm to fly in the air with a little boy! Oh, good gracious me! Good gracious me! What am I to do?" And he stamped up and down, wringing his hands.

"It's that or the revolver," said Tinker sweetly.

The financier clutched at his hair and raved: fear and avarice, conflicting, tore at his vitals. He owed his millions to no genuine force of character, but to luck, industry, and dishonesty. In this great crisis of his life he was helpless. Tinker, trained from babyhood by his wise father to study his fellow creatures, understood something of this, and began to goad him to the effort.

"It's a lot of money to lose," said he thoughtfully.

"The sweat of my brow! The sweat of my brow!" groaned the financier, who had really made it by the nimbleness of his tongue.

"And it seems a pity to blow your brains out, which hurts a good deal, before you've tried every chance," said Tinker.

The financier groaned.

"At any rate, if we did come a cropper, you'd be no worse off."

"Ah!" cried the financier, stopping short. "Why shouldn't I wake Herr Schlugst, and get him to take me?"

"Because he won't," said Tinker quietly. "He told me that nothing would induce him to try a flight in the night. He's all right in the daytime, but the darkness funks him. Foreigners are like that; they'll go to a certain point all right, but there they stop. That's what I've noticed. I notice these things, you know." He spoke indulgently.

It never occurred to the financier to doubt him; he was already a little under the influence of the cooler head. He walked up and down a little longer; and Tinker said no more. He had been taught to leave people to themselves when he saw them beginning to come to his way of thinking.

At last, with a horrible grimace which showed the depth of his agony, the financier cried, "I'll come! I'll come! I'll trust my life—oh, my precious life—to you. After all, you rescued the Kernaby child; and you had to fight to do it! I'll risk it! Oh, my money! My money!"

"Very good," said Tinker. "I'll come for you at half-past twelve. Put on your

warmest great-coat. It'll be cold." And he slipped gently out of the room.

Five minutes later the distracted financier rang his bell, and ordered a bottle of 1820 liqueur brandy. It was the best thing he could have done: a private detective, who was sitting on guard in a room lower down the corridor to see that he did not go downstairs again, believed him to have thrown up the sponge, and to be drowning his sorrow, and allowed himself to become immersed in the current number of the *Family Herald*.

As was his practice, Sir Tancred, on his way to bed, looked in on Tinker, and found him sleeping the profound sleep of youth and innocence. But no sooner did he hear his father in bed and still, than he rose from that profound sleep of youth and innocence, dressed, even to his great-coat. He took a letter from his pocket, and put it prominently on the dressing-table. It ran:

DEAR FATHER:

I have taken Bloomenroot to Parris in Herr Shlugst flyingmacheen. Bring him to meet me at the Ifell Tower.

Your affectionate son
TINKER.

Then, with his boots in his hand, he stole across to the financier's room. Thanks to the brandy, the financier looked very much wound up. Tinker bade him write on a sheet of notepaper, "Don't call me till eleven," pinned it on the outside of his bedroom door, locked it, and took the key. He left the sitting-room door unlocked. Then he opened the window, and, followed by his protégé, who was already shivering with dread, he stepped out on to the balcony with the air of the leader of an army. The balcony ran round the hotel, as a way of escape during a fire; it was broad, and since the night was starry, but fairly dark, they were little likely to be seen from below by the detectives watching the hotel doors. They walked round to the back, came through a window into a bathroom, through the bathroom on to the servants' staircase, and went right down into the basement.

"I get up early in the morning before the servants, and I had to find a way out," said Tinker in an explanatory whisper.

He led the way through the kitchen into a long passage, set with the doors of cellars on either side. At the end of the passage was a short ladder with rounded iron rungs, by which barrels were lowered, and Tinker, mounting three rungs, pushed back a bolt, raised the heavy trap a little, and peered about from under it.

"The street's clear," he said. "Come on!"

He slipped out on to the pavement, helped the clumsy financier through the trap, caught his hand, and ran him across the street into a narrow lane.

"There!" he said cheerfully. "That's the most difficult part of the business! You're out of the hotel, and not a soul knows it!"

The financier's spirits brightened. Tinker had shown him his mettle, and he began to have confidence. Besides, he had drunk a good deal of the bottle of brandy. They hurried through the town by byways, and up on to the cliffs. As they neared the palisade, and saw the great bulk of the balloon looming through the starlight, the panting financier's spirits sank: his teeth chattered, and his knees knocked together.

"Oh, buck up! Buck up!" said Tinker impatiently. "You're all right! You're all right!"

It was a matter of a few seconds for him to climb the door of the palisades, drop lightly on the other side, and open it. He steered the financier gingerly round the planes, past the propelling and steering fans, and got him into the car. He set him well forward in the bows of it, and began to let the rope unwind from the windlass which moored the flying-machine. All the while he heard the steady snores of Herr Schlugst, sleeping in his iron hut.

The flying-machine rose slowly with very little creaking for all the greatness of the planes; the last of the rope ran out, and the lights of the town sank like stones in water beneath them.

"Right away!" cried Tinker joyfully, and the financier gasped.

When the lights of the town were a mere blur beneath them, Tinker switched on the electric lamps, and the millionaire saw him sitting on a wicker seat in the stern of the boat-shaped car, surrounded by levers, instruments, and dials. Tinker bade him grip the steel rails on either side of the car, and get ready for a swoop.

Then he set the motor going, and steered round the flying-machine on to her course. She rose and rose, moving steadily forward at the same time, far above the sound of the waves of the Channel.

Now Herr Schlugst did not rely so much on his propeller for speed as on his skilful adaptation of the principle on which the bird swoops. When the aneroid told Tinker that the car had reached the height of 3000 feet, he opened a valve, and let the gas escape slowly from the balloon. The instant she began to sink he switched to a slight downward angle the great planes, some seventy feet long, which were fixed parallel to the car. The machine began to glide downwards on them, gathering momentum from the weight of the car, at a quickly increasing speed, until she was tearing through the air at the rate of forty miles an hour, and sinking a hundred feet in the mile. The financier sat hunched up, gasping and shivering as the air whizzed past his ears and shrilled among the ropes. Tinker, with an air of cheerful excitement, kept the machine on her course, and watched the aneroid: his face of a seraph was peculiarly appropriate to these high altitudes, though the millionaire was too busy with his fears to observe the fact.

In half an hour the machine had rushed down to five hundred feet above the sea: Tinker switched the planes to the same angle upwards: and the momentum drove her up the incline of the air with little diminished speed. Then he turned a tap and let the stored gas, compressed in an aluminum cylinder, flow into the balloon, and restored the whole machine to its former buoyancy. Moving more and more slowly the higher it rose, the flying-machine once more gained the height of 3000 feet, and once more swooped down from it. At the beginning of the upward sweep, Tinker said, "Another swoop like that will bring us to Paris."

The financier, who had spent the time qualifying for a place among the invertebrates, only groaned. Tinker was disgusted; but he said, "Cheer up! You're the first man who has ever crossed the Channel in a flying-machine. You'll be in the History books!"

The car rose and rose: Tinker had just resolved to swoop from 3500 feet this time, when of a sudden she rose out of the windless area into a stiff breeze, icily chill. They learnt what had happened by the balloon bumping down on their heads with apparent intent to smother them, and in a breath the car was spinning round, and jerking furiously to and fro. The millionaire screamed and bumped about the car, and bumped and screamed. Tinker set his teeth, jammed the flying-machine into the teeth of the wind, switched down the planes, and tried to

drive her down. It was no use; she was whirled along like a piece of thistle down. Then he opened the valve and let her sink. In three minutes she had fallen below the wind, and was shooting swiftly on the downward swoop. The financier was staring at him with a frenzied eye. Tinker closed the valve, and said with a joyous brightness, "She was quite out of control for a good five minutes!"

"She was quite out of control for a good five minutes!"

[Illustration: "She was quite out of control for a good five minutes!"]

The financier frankly gave it up; with a rending gasp he fell back in a dead faint.

Tinker shrugged his shoulders, regulated the pace of the machine by letting gas flow from the cylinder into the balloon till it was of the proper buoyancy, then roped the senseless financier to the bottom of the car, and came back to the helm.

The wind they had risen into had been blowing towards the east, so they had not lost ground during their tossing, but they had been driven south of their course, and he did not know exactly how to get back to it. On the dark earth beneath he could see towns as blurs of light on all sides of him, but no one of them was big enough to be Paris. He let the machine swoop on down to five hundred feet, and up again. On the upward course, from fifteen hundred feet he saw a great blur of light on the northern horizon: it was Paris, and he was swooping past it. He steered the machine round without taking the way off her, and swooped down towards the city. At the end of the swoop he was already over the suburbs, and he switched off the electric lamps. He took the way off the machine by switching up the planes; and then, using only the propeller, circled round, seeking for the Eiffel Tower. Presently he saw it looming through the first dim grey light of the dawn, steered over it, let fall a grapnel, and hooked it into the railings which ran round it; took a turn of the rope round the windlass, and wound the machine down to within twenty feet of the top. Then he went to the financier, unroped him, and kicked him in the ribs ungently.

As he kicked, saying, "Get up! Get up!" an astonished voice below cried, "Qui vive?"

Looking over the side of the car Tinker saw dimly the figure of a gendarme, and said briskly, "Santos-Dumont!"

"Vive Santos-Dumont!" cried the gendarme with enthusiasm.

Tinker went back to the financier, and kicked him again.

"Where am I? Where am I?" he murmured faintly.

"On the top of the Eiffel Tower," said Tinker.

"What? Saved! Saved!" cried the financier, for all the world as though he had been in a melodrama; and he sat up.

"I should like the five thousand pounds, please," said Tinker, brought back by the touch of earth from his aerial dreams to cold reality.

"Five thousand pounds!" cried the financier, every faculty alert at the mention of money. "No, no! How am I to get five thousand pounds? Five hundred now! Five hundred pounds is an enormous sum—an enormous sum for a little boy, or even fifty! Yes, yes; fifty!"

"That's really very tiresome," said Tinker very gently. "I never thought you'd be so foolish as to leave all that money in empty rooms in an hotel. Well, well, we must fly straight back and get it. I hope we shall have as good luck as we had coming over." And he turned to the levers.

"Here! here! here!" screamed the financier; tore a button off his coat in his haste to get at his breast pocket; whipped out his notecase, and with trembling fingers took five notes from the bundle which stuffed it, and thrust them into Tinker's hand.

Tinker counted them, made sure that each was for a thousand pounds, and put them in his pocket. Then he looked down at the gendarme, and said in French:

"I want to drop my assistant. Will you conduct him to the bottom of the tower?"

"Mais oui! Avec plaisir, Monsieur le Comte!" cried the gendarme, striking himself hard on the chest to show his eager enthusiasm.

"Merci bien," said Tinker, lowering the rope ladder.

The gendarme held it steady, and the financier descended gingerly. When he was off it, and the gendarme had loosed it, Tinker said "Au revoir! and mind you wire to my father at once, and let the grapnel rope slip out of the windlass." Lightened of the financier, the machine shot up into the air.

Tinker's task was done: he had only to restore the machine to Herr Schlugst; but he had a long while to wait. He realised suddenly that he was hungry and very, very sleepy. By letting some gas escape, he reduced the machine to a controllable buoyancy, and set about warming the coffee which the thoughtful Herr Schlugst had ready made. Then with brown bread, butter, and German sausage, he made an excellent breakfast. It was light by the time he had finished; and he set about looking for a sleeping-place, for he could not keep awake long. A wood on a hill some miles away seemed to him the spot he sought. He swooped gently for it, and was soon anchored to a tree-top and sleeping peacefully. It was past noon when a shouting awoke him. He looked down to find the wood full of people, four or five bold photographic spirits in the tree to which he was anchored, but nowhere near his grapnel, which was among the smaller branches. The roads leading to the wood were choked with bicycles, motor-cars, and pedestrians; and a station near was disgorging a crowd of people from an excursion train. It was time to be going.

He cut the grapnel rope, and started leisurely for Paris. He reached it in about an hour, and circled about it, observing it from above. Then he came to the Eiffel Tower, and practised steering round it, to the great joy of an excited and applauding crowd which thronged its top and stages. It was a great moment. He steered away over Paris, made a meal of the coffee, brown bread, and sausage left, and came back.

He was growing tired of waiting, and was meditating crossing over the top of the tower and pouring a little water from the ballast tank on the sympathetic crowd, when he saw his father and Herr Schlugst forcing their way through it. At once he rose above the tower and let down the grapnel. A dozen hands seized it, and drew down the machine. Tinker let the stored gas flow into the balloon to allow for Herr Schlugst's extra weight; and lowered the rope-ladder. The bursting Teuton came clambering up it, forcing down the car and planes by his weight on to the heads of the crowd, which was forced to hold them up with a thousand hands.

"Ach, you young tevil my machine to sdeal!" he cried, tumbling into the car.

"You shouldn't have refused to take me with you," said Tinker, preparing to slip over the other side on to anyone's head.

"What haf you broke? What haf you broke?" cried Herr Schlugst, looking round at the instruments with a practised eye, and seeing them unharmed.

"Nothing. What should I break anything for?" said Tinker scornfully.

"No; dere is nodings broke, schoundrel. But vere—vere is mine von tousand pound? I ask you! Vare is mine von tousand pound! You haf ruined me! Ruined me!"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Tinker. "I had a passenger who paid his fare. Here are two thousand pounds." And he gave him two of the notes.

Herr Schlugst opened his mouth and stared at the notes, "Doo tousand pound! Doo tousand pound!" he muttered thickly. "You vas von vonder-child! Von vonder-child!"

Tinker bade him good-bye, and slipped out of the car, leaving him to fly to some smooth place in the environs, where he could dismantle his machine. Sir Tancred was too thankful for Tinker's safety to be very angry with him: and they descended the tower surrounded by gendarmes, who were put to it to preserve Tinker from the embraces of excited persons of either sex. One fat Frenchman, indeed, kissed him on both cheeks, crying, "Vive le rosbif! vive le rosbif!" before he could ward him off.

At the bottom of the tower Mr. Blumenruth, radiant and triumphant, burst through the throng, flung himself upon them, and dragged them to a smart victoria which awaited them. He told them joyously that he had cleared eighty-seven thousand pounds, and protested that they should be his guests at his hotel as long as they stayed in Paris. On the way to it Sir Tancred got down to buy some cigars, and he was barely in the shop when the financier said in a jerky way to Tinker, "I saw a very neat little motor-car, which I should like to make you a present of. But I say—I don't want you to tell anyone—how—how ill I was up there. My spirit was all right, of course; but that rarefied air—acting on business worries—produced a state of nervous prostration. I—I wasn't quite myself, in fact."

Tinker looked at him with intelligent interest, and, closing one of his sunny blue eyes, said thoughtfully, "Nervous prostration? Is the motor a Panhard?"

"Yes," said Mr. Blumenruth.

"If you hadn't been so—so—upset, I've no doubt you'd have sailed the machine yourself," said Tinker warmly.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE BARON AND THE MONEY-LENDER

Sir Tancred would only stay four days in Paris with the grateful Blumenruth, because he wished Hildebrand Anne to have the sea air, for it seemed to him that he had not yet got back his full strength after the scarlet fever. They returned, therefore, to Brighton, and when the weather grew hotter, removed to the more bracing East Coast. Tinker was for sharing the three thousand pounds he had made out of his trip in the flying-machine equally with his father; but Sir Tancred would not hear of it. Chiefly to please him, however, he borrowed a thousand of it at five per cent., and invested the rest in Tinker's name. With this thousand-pound note and three notes of fifty pounds, he paid off the loan of a thousand pounds which he had borrowed from Mr. Robert Lambert, a money-lender, five years before, with the balance of the interest up to date, and found himself once more unencumbered save for a few small debts, and with plenty of money for his immediate needs.

During August and September they stayed at different country houses; and Fortune being in a kindly mood, the money remained untouched. In the middle of October they came to London to their usual rooms in the Hotel Cecil; and Sir Tancred was one morning at breakfast disagreeably surprised to receive from Mr. Robert Lambert a demand for the immediate payment of 1450 pounds. At first he thought it was a mistake, then he remembered that he had paid Mr. Lambert in notes; and that Mr. Lambert had promised to get at once from his bank the promissory note on which the money had been borrowed, and send it to him. The promissory note had not come, and the matter had passed from Sir Tancred's

mind. Now, he perceived that, if Mr. Lambert chose to deny that payment, he was in no little of a plight.

After breakfast, therefore, he took a hansom, and drove to Mr. Lambert's office. The worthy money-lender received him at once, and with no less delay began to deny with every appearance of honest indignation that he had been paid the debt. Sir Tancred grew exceedingly disagreeable; he set forth with perfect frankness his opinion of Mr. Lambert's character, declared that he would rather go to that uncomfortable abode of contemptuous debtors, Holloway, than be swindled in so barefaced a fashion; and exclaiming, "You may go to your native Jericho, before I pay you a farthing, you thieving rascal!" went out of the office, and banged the door behind him.

The worthy money-lender smiled an uncomfortable and malignant smile at the banged door, and at once gave instructions to his manager to take proceedings. Sir Tancred explained the transaction to Tinker; warned him against laxness in matters of business; prepared for immediate flight; and they caught the midnight mail from Euston. By the time an indefatigable bailiff had ascertained next day that they had left London, they were eating their dinner, in a secure peace, at Ardrochan Lodge in Ardrochan forest, which Sir Tancred had borrowed for the while from his friend Lord Crosland.

Hildebrand Anne was used to long periods unenlivened by companions of his own age; and he began forthwith to make the best of the forest. Some days he stalked the red deer with his father; some days were devoted to his education, fencing, boxing, and gymnastics; and on the others he explored the forest on a shaggy pony. It was of a comfortable size, forty square miles or thereabouts, stretches of wild heath, broken by strips of wood, craggy hills, and swamps, full of streams, and abounding in many kinds of animals. It was an admirable place for Indians, outlaws, brigands, and robber barons, and Tinker practised all these professions in turn, with the liveliest satisfaction.

At first it was something of a tax on his imagination to be a whole band of these engaging persons himself; with one companion it would have been easy enough, but his imagination presently compassed the task. And when he found his way to the Deil's Den, a low stone tower on a hill some six miles from Ardrochan, his favourite occupation was that of robber baron. It would have been more proper to put the tower to its old use of a lair of a Highland cateran; but, to his shame, Tinker funk'd the dialect with which such a person must

necessarily be cursed.

The Deil's Den had earned its name in earlier centuries from the bloody deeds of its first owners. No gillie would go within a mile of it, even in bright sunshine. Tinker's carelessness of its ghosts, a headless woman and a redheaded man with his throat cut, had won him the deepest respect of the village, or rather hamlet, of Ardrochan. Twice he had constrained himself to wait in the tower till dusk, in the hope that his fearful, but inquiring, spirit would be gratified by the sight of one or other of these psychic curiosities.

It was a two-storied building, and its stone seemed likely to last as long as the hills from which it had been quarried. In some thought that it might be used as a watch-tower by his keepers, Lord Crosland had repaired its inside, and fitted it with a stout door and two ladders, one running to the second story and another to the roof. From here the keen eyes of Hildebrand Anne, Baron of Ardrochan, scanned often the countryside, looking for travelling merchants or wandering knights; while his gallant steed Black Rudolph, whose coat was drab and dingy, waited saddled and bridled below, and Blazer the bloodhound sniffed about the burn hard by. Blazer had a weakness for rats quite uncommon in bloodhounds.

Tinker cherished but a faint hope that Fortune would ever send him a prisoner, even a braw, shock-headed lad, or sonsie, savage lassie of the country. But he did not do justice to that goddess's love of mischief. It was she who inspired into Mr. Robert Lambert the desire to shine in the Great World; and it was she who gave him the idea of taking for the season Lord Hardacre's house and forest of Tullispaith, in lieu of the cash which he would never get. Thither he invited certain spirited young clients, who had practically only the choice of being Mr. Lambert's guests at Tullispaith or King Edward's at Holloway. Thither he came, a week beforehand, to make ready for them.

At once he set about becoming an accomplished deer-stalker. For three days he rode, or tramped, about the forest of Tullispaith, in search of red deer which, in quite foolish estimate of their peril, insisted always on putting a hill between themselves and his rifle. On the fourth day he rested, for though his spirit was willing, his legs were weak. This inactivity irked him, for he knew the tireless energy of the English sportsman; and at noon Fortune inspired him with the most disastrous idea of all, the idea of taking a stroll by himself. He took his rifle and a packet of sandwiches, and set out. Now to the unpractised eye any one brae, or glen, or burn of bonnie Scotland is exactly like any other brae, or glen, or burn

of that picturesque land. He had not gone two miles before he had lost his way.

He did not mind, for he was sure that he knew his direction. He was wrong; he may have been like his Oriental ancestors in some of his qualities, but he lacked their ingrained sense of orientation; and he was walking steadily away from the house of Tullispaith. He rested often and he looked often at his watch. He passed over the border of Tullispaith into the forest of Ardrochan, and wandered wearily on and on. The autumn sun was moving down the western sky at a disquieting speed, when at last he caught sight of the Dell's Den, and with a new energy hurried towards it.

At about the same time Hildebrand Anne, the robber baron of Ardrochan, caught sight of him, mounted Black Rudolph, and rode down to meet him, ready to drag or lure him to his stronghold. The angel face of Tinker had never looked more angelic to human being than it looked to the weary money-lender. He had never seen him before; therefore, he had no reason to suppose that that face was not the index to an angelic nature. Unfortunately, Tinker knew by sight most of his father's friends and enemies, and at the first glance he recognised the squat figure, the thick, square nose, and muddy complexion of Mr. Robert Lambert.

"My lad," said the money-lender, failing to perceive that he was addressing one of the worst kind of man in all romance, "I've lost my way. I want to get to the house of Tullispaith. Which is the road?"

"There is no road; and it's eight miles away," said Tinker, knitting his brow into the gloomy and forbidding frown of a robber baron.

"Eight miles! What am I to do? Where is the nearest place I can get a conveyance?"

"It would be a twenty-mile drive if you got a cart, and there's no cart nearer than Ardrochan, and that's six miles away."

"Well, then, a horse, or a pony, and a guide?"

"You could get a pony at Hamish Beg's; and one of his sons could guide you."

"Where does he live? How can I get there?"

"Three miles the other side of that tower."

"Will you show me the way? I'll give you—I'll give you half-a-crown."

"Hildebrand Anne of Ardrochan is not the hired varlet of every wandering chapster," said Tinker with a splendid air.

"I'm not a wandering chapster," said the money-lender. "I'm a gentleman of London. I'll give you five shillings—half a sovereign—a pound!"

"The offer of money to one in whose veins flows the proudest blood of the North is an insult!" said Tinker in a terrible voice.

"No offence! No offence!" said Mr. Lambert, cursing what he believed to be the penniless Highland pride under his breath.

Suddenly Tinker saw his way. "From the top of yon tower I can show you the path to Hamish Beg's. Follow me," he said, turned his pony, and led the way up the hill with a sinister air.

With a groan, the money-lender, quite unobservant of the sinister air, breasted the ascent. He set down his rifle by the door of the tower, and followed Tinker up the ladders.

"You see those two pine trees between those two far hills?" said Tinker.

Mr. Lambert drew round his field-glasses, and after long fumbling, focussed them on the pines. "Well?" he said.

There was no answer; he turned to his angel guide, and found himself alone on the tower. He ran to the top of the ladder and looked down. At the bottom stood Tinker regarding him with an excellent sardonic smile: "Ha! ha!" he cried in a gruff, triumphant voice, "Trapped—trapped!" And he turned on his heel.

The money-lender heard the door slam and the key turn in the lock. He ran to the parapet, and saw Tinker mounting his pony with an easy grace and the air of one who has performed a meritorious action.

"Hi! Hullo! What are you up to?" cried Mr. Lambert.

"Foul extortioner! Your crimes have found you out! You have consigned many a poor soul to the dungeon, it is your turn now," said Tinker with admirable grandiloquence. Then, dropping to his ordinary voice, he added plaintively: "Of course it's not really a dungeon; it ought to be underground—with rats. But we must make the best of it."

"Look here, my lad," said Mr. Lambert thickly. "I don't want any of your silly games! I shall be late enough home as it is. You unlock that door, and show me the way to this Beg's at once! D'ye hear?"

Tinker laughed a good scornful laugh. "Lambert of London," he said, returning to the romantic vein, "to-night reflect on your misdeeds. To-morrow we will treat of your ransom. Hans Breithelm and Jorgan Schwartz, ye answer for this caitiff's safe keeping with your heads! I charge ye watch him well. To horse, my brave men. We ride to Ardrochan!" And he turned his pony.

"To-night reflect on your misdeeds. To-morrow we will treat of your ransom."

**[Illustration: "To-night reflect on your misdeeds.
To-morrow we will treat of your ransom."]**

The money-lender broke into threats and abuse; then, as the pony drew further away, he passed to entreaties. Tinker never turned his head; he rode on, brimming with joyous triumph; he had a real prisoner.

Mr. Lambert shouted after him till he was hoarse, he shouted after him till his voice was a wheezy croak. Tinker passed out of sight without a glance back, and, for a while, that iron-hearted, inexorable man of many loans, sobbed like a child with mingled rage and fear. Then he scrambled down the ladder, and tried the door. There was no chance of his bursting it open; that was a feat far beyond his strength; and though he might have worked the rusted bars out of the window, he could never have forced his rotundity through it. Then he bethought himself of passers-by, and hurried to the top of the tower. There was no one in sight. He shouted and shouted till he lost his voice again; the echoes died away among the empty hills. He leaned upon the parapet waiting, with the faintest hope that the diabolical boy would tire of his joke, return, and set him free. Again and again he asked himself who was this boy who had recognised him in this Scotch desert.

The dusk gathered till he could not see a hundred yards from the tower. Then he came down, struck a match, and examined the bottom room; it was being borne in upon him that he was destined to spend the night in it. It was some twelve feet square, and the stone floor was clean. In one corner was a pile of heather; but there was no way of stopping up the window, and the night was setting in chill.

He went back to the top of the tower; it was dark now. He shouted again. The conviction of the hopelessness of his plight was taking a strong hold upon him, and he was growing hungry. He stamped wearily round the top of the tower to warm his chilling body, pondering a hundred futile plans of escape, breaking off to consign to perdition the deceptive angel child, and meditating many different revenges. At the end of an hour he went down the ladder, and flung himself on the pile of heather in a paroxysm of despair.

Till nearly ten o'clock he went now and again to the top of the tower, and

shouted. He was beginning to grow very hungry. At ten o'clock he buried himself in the heather, and slept for an hour. He awoke cold and stiff, and his sensitive stomach, used to the tenderest indulgence, was clamouring angrily. He was learning what the cold and hunger, which, by a skilful manipulation of the laws of his adopted country, he had been able to mete out to many foolish innocents with no grudging hand, really were. He went to the top of the tower, and shouted fruitlessly; he warmed himself by stamping up and down; then he came and slept again. This was his round all the night through: snatches of uneasy sleep, cold and hungry awakenings, shoutings, and stampings round the top of the tower.

Meanwhile Tinker had ridden joyously home, and shown himself in such cheerful spirits during dinner that Sir Tancred had observed him with no little suspicion, wondering if it could really be that he had found opportunities of mischief even in a deer-forest. After dinner Tinker went into the kitchen, where he found Hamish Beg supping. He talked to him for a while, on matters of sport; then he said, "I say, you told me about the headless woman and the red-headed man with his throat cut, at the Deil's Den, but you never told me about the man in brown who shouts and waves from the top of the tower, and when you come to it, it's empty."

Hamish, the cook, and the two maids burst into a torrent of exclamations in their strange language. "Yes," said Tinker, "a man in brown who shouts and waves from the top of the tower, and when you come to it, no one's there."

He kept his story to this, and presently came back to his father, assured that the more loudly Mr. Lambert yelled, and the more wildly he waved, the further would any inhabitant of Ardrochan fly from the Deil's Den. He went to bed in a gloating joy, which kept him awake a while; and it was during those wakeful moments that a memory of "Monte Cristo" suggested that he should gain a practical advantage from what had so far been merely an act of abstract justice.

It was past eleven when Tinker came riding over the hills at the head of his merry, but imaginary men. Horribly hungry, but warmed by the sun to a quite passable malignity, the money-lender watched his coming from the top of the tower, pondering how to catch him and thrash him within an inch of his life. He did not know that far more active men than he had cherished vainly that arrogant ambition, but Tinker's cheerful and confident air afforded little encouragement to his purpose.

"Halt!" cried the robber baron, reining up his pony. "Hans and Jorgan, is your captive safe? Good. Bring him forth." He turned to his invisible band. "To your quarters, varlets! I would confer alone with the usurious"—he rolled the satisfying word finely off his tongue—"rogue."

Hand on hip he sat, and watched his merry figments dismount and lead away their horses.

He turned, and frowned splendidly on the prisoner. "What think ye of our hospitality, Lambert of London?" he said.

Mr. Lambert scowled; his emotion was too deep for words.

Suddenly Tinker dropped the robber baron, and became his frank and engaging self: "I'm sorry to be so late," he said with a charming air of apology, "but I had to send a message to Tullispaith to say that you would not be back till Saturday, or perhaps Monday."

"What!" screamed Mr. Lambert. "What do you mean?"

"Well, I didn't want them to hunt for you. I'm going to keep you here till you do what I want," said Tinker with a seraphic smile.

"You young rascal! You mean to try and keep me here!" screamed Mr. Lambert, jumping about in a light, but ungainly fashion. "Oh, I'll teach you! I'll make you repent this till your dying day! You think you can keep me here! You shall see. The first shepherd, the first keeper who passes will let me out. And I won't rest"—and he swore an oath quite unfit for boyish ears—"till I've hunted you down!"

"No one will come within a mile of the Deil's Den," said the unruffled Tinker. "It's haunted by a headless woman and a redheaded man with his throat cut. But perhaps you've seen them. Besides, I've told them that there's a man in brown who shouts and waves, and then disappears when anyone comes to the tower. Why, if they see you, they'll run for their lives." He spoke with a convicting quietness.

Mr. Lambert doubled up over the parapet in a gasping anguish.

"You're not going to leave here till you give me a letter for your clerk, telling

him to hand over Sir Tancred Beauleigh's promissory note," said Tinker.

Mr. Lambert rejected the suggestion in extravagant language.

"You bandy words with me!" cried the Baron Hildebrand Anne of Ardrochan. "Lambert of London, beware! Think, rash rogue, on your grinders! Hans and Jorgan, prepare the red-hot pincers! You have a quarter of an hour to reflect, Lambert."

He flung himself off his pony, tethered it, strode down to the spring which trickled out of the hillside some forty yards away, and came back bearing a big jug full of water.

Mr. Lambert watched him in a bursting fury, at whiles scanning the empty hills with a raging eye. Suddenly light dawned on him: "Are you the boy who stole the flying-machine?" he cried.

"You mind your own business!" said Tinker tartly; it was his cherished belief that he had borrowed the flying-machine.

Mr. Lambert understood at last with whom he had to deal; and the knowledge was not cheering. His angry stomach clamoured at him to come to terms, but his greed was still too strong for it.

"The time is up, Lambert of London!" said Tinker presently, very sternly. "Will you ransom your base carcase?"

The money-lender turned his back on him with a lofty dignity.

"Ha! ha! Hunger shall tame that proud spirit!" said the Baron of Ardrochan.

Suddenly the money-lender heard the door opened, and he dashed for the ladder. He scrambled down it in time to hear the key turn again, but the jug of water stood inside. He took it up and drank a deep draught. He had not known that he was so thirsty, never dreamed that water could be so appetising. He heard Tinker summon his men, and when he came back to the top of the tower, he was riding away. He watched him go with a sinking heart, and, since he was so empty, it had a good depth to sink to. Twice he opened his mouth to call him back, but greed prevailed.

The day wore wearily through. His spoilt stomach was now raving at him in a savage frenzy. Now and again he shouted, but less often as the afternoon drew on, for he knew surely that it was hopeless.

As the dusk fell, he found himself remembering Tinker's words about the headless woman and the redheaded man, and began to curse his folly in not having come to terms. At times his hunger was a veritable anguish. This night was a thousand times worse than the night before. His hunger gave him little rest, and he awoke from his brief sleep in fits of abject terror, fancying that the redheaded man was staring in through the window; he saw his gashed throat quite plainly. He grew colder and colder, for he was too faint with hunger to stamp about the top of the tower. Later he must have grown delirious, for he saw the headless woman climbing up the ladder to the second story. It must have been delirium, for the figure he saw wore an ordinary nightrail, whereas the lady of the legend wore a russet gown. Some years later, as it seemed to him, the dawn came. It grew warmer; and he huddled into the pile of heather and slept.

He was awakened by a shout of "Lambert of London, awake!" and tottering to the window, groaning, he beheld a cold grouse, a three-pound chunk of venison, two loaves, and a small bottle of whiskey neatly set out on a napkin. His mouth opened and shut, and opened and shut.

"The letter, rogue! Are you going to give me the letter?" shouted the Baron Hildebrand Anne fiercely.

Mr. Lambert tore himself from the window, and flung himself down on the heather, sobbing. "Fourteen hundred and fifty pounds!" he moaned, "Fourteen hundred and fifty pounds!—and costs!" Suddenly his wits cleared ... What a fool he'd been!... Why shouldn't he give the boy the letter, and wire countermanding his instructions?... Oh, he had been a fool!

He hurried to the window, and cried, "Yes, yes, I'll give it you! Give me the paper. I've got a fountain pen!"

"You'd better have a drink of whiskey first; your hand will be too shaky to write your usual handwriting," said the thoughtful Tinker, handing him the bottle along with the note-paper.

Mr. Lambert took a drink, and indeed it steadied his hand. Sure that he could make it useless, he wrote a careful and complete letter, lying at full length on the

floor, his only possible writing table.

He scrambled up, and thrust it through the window, crying, "Here you are! Let me out!"

Tinker spelled the letter carefully through, and put it into another letter he had already prepared to send to Sir Tancred's solicitors. Then he handed the money-lender a thick venison sandwich, cut while he had been writing.

The tears ran down Mr. Lambert's face as his furious jaws bit into it.

"Don't wolf it!" said Tinker sternly. "Starving men should feed slowly."

Mr. Lambert had no restraint; he did wolf it. Then he asked for more.

"In a quarter of an hour," said Tinker, and he gave him nothing sooner for all his clamorous entreaties.

After a second sandwich the money-lender was another man, and Tinker, seeing that he was not ill, said, "I must be going; I have a long ride to post this letter"; and he began to hand in the rest of the food through the window.

"Be careful not to eat it all up at once," he said. "It's got to last you till to-morrow."

"What's this! What's this!" cried Mr. Lambert. "You promised to release me when you got the letter!"

"When I get the promissory note, or when my father's solicitor gets it. I've told him to wire."

The money-lender snarled like a dog; his brilliant idea had proved of no good. He stormed and stormed; Tinker was cheerful, but indifferent. He thrust a rug he had brought with him through the window, summoned his phantom band, and rode away.

Mr. Lambert spent a gloomy, but, thanks to the soothing of his stomach, a not uncomfortable day. He was very sad that he had lost the chance of swindling Sir Tancred Beauleigh out of 1450 pounds; and his sadness and an occasional twinge of rheumatism filled him with thoughts of revenge. Slowly he formed a

plan of disabling Tinker by an unexpected kick when he opened the door, thrashing him within an inch of his life, riding off on his pony, and leaving him helpless, to starve or not, according as he might be found. This plan was a real comfort to him. He passed an unhaunted night; and next morning Tinker brought him more food. For some hours he played at robber baron, and now and again held conversations about the money-lender with his band. None of them contained compliments. Mr. Lambert watched him with a sulky malignity, and matured his plan.

The next morning he awoke late, but very cheerful at the prospect of freedom and revenge. He came to the window rubbing his hands joyfully, and saw a little parcel hanging from the bars. He opened it, and found the key of the door, a little compass, and a letter. Swearing at his vanished chance of revenge, he opened it; it ran:

Fly at once. Steer N. E. for Tulyspathe. Hamish believes you are uncanny, and has molded a silver bullet out of a half crown to lay your restless spirit with. His rifle is oldfashioned, but he will not miss and waste the half crown he is so thrifty.

A SEKRET WORNER.

Mr. Lambert steered N.E. at once; he went not like the wind, but as much like the wind as his soft, short legs would carry him. He scanned every bush and gully with fearful eyes; he gave every thicket a wide berth, and every time he saw Hamish, and he saw him behind a thousand bushes and boulders, he shouted: "I'm Mr. Lambert from London, I'm not a spirit!"

It was, indeed, a wasted and dirty money-lender who reached Tullispaithe late in the day. He had but one thought in his mind, to fly immediately after dinner from this expansive and terrifying country. He wired to his guests not to come; he discharged his servants; and as he crossed the border next day, he bade farewell to the stern and wild Caledonia in a most impressive malediction.

When Sir Tancred Beauleigh received his lawyer's letter containing the promissory note, he was not a little bewildered; Tinker was quick to enlighten him; and he heard that angel child's explanation of his application of mediaeval German methods to a modern monetary difficulty with a grateful astonishment.

CHAPTER NINE

TINKER INTERVENES

Sir Tancred lingered on at Ardrochan Lodge, for he saw that in that strong air Tinker was losing the last of the delicacy which had been the effect of his attack of scarlet fever. And when Lord Crosland and two other men joined him there, he was very well contented. The others shared his content; Tinker, more and more the Baron Hildebrand of Ardrochan, was quite happy, and there they stayed till the Scotch winter came down on them in all its fell severity.

Then they moved southwards to Melton Mowbray, and hunted till the frost put an end to that sport. On the third night of the frost, as they were cutting for partners for a fresh rubber of bridge, Lord Crosland said: "I tell you what, Beauleigh, the sooner we get out of this weather the better. Let's be off to Monte Carlo, make up a pool, and try that system of yours."

"It's a very good idea," said Sir Tancred. "The only question is whether the English winter isn't good for Tinker. It's hardening, you know."

"Always Tinker," said Lord Crosland with a smile. "I tell you what, Nature ought to have made you a woman: what a splendid mother you'd have made!"

"I think she'd have found she'd made a pretty bad mistake," said Sir Tancred.

"Besides," said Lord Crosland, "the Admirable is as hard as a tenpenny nail as it is. I've never seen the little beggar tired yet; and I've seen him at the end of some hardish days."

"Well, we'll see," said Sir Tancred. "We're partners." And the game went on.

Next morning he asked Tinker if he would like to go to the south of France, or stay and be hardened. Tinker thought a while, made up his mind that his father would like to go to the South of France, and said, "I think I'm hard enough, sir,—to go on with. Besides,

"When the wind is in the East
It's neither fit for man nor beast.

In fact it shrivels me up. I should like some sunshine."

"Then we will go," said Sir Tancred.

Accordingly, the middle of the next week found them lodged at the Hôtel des Princes, Monte Carlo, enjoying the nourishing sunshine of the Riviera. At least Tinker was enjoying it; the demands of a system required his father and Lord Crosland to spend most of their day in the darker, though hardly cooler air of the Temple of Fortune. But the system went well, and they did not repine.

The first time he dined in the restaurant of the hotel, Sir Tancred was disagreeably surprised to see sitting at a neighbouring table his loathed uncle, Sir Everard Wigram. They had met now and again during the past nine years; but as such a meeting had always resulted in some severe wound to the Baronet's dignity, he shunned his nephew like the pest, and abused him from a distance. At the same table sat a charming, peach-complexioned English girl. After a careful scrutiny of her, Sir Tancred decided that she must be his cousin Claire, Sir Everard's eldest child, and admitted with a very grudging reluctance that even the rule that thorns do not produce grapes is proved by exceptions. The third person at their table was a handsome young man, with glossy black hair, a high-coloured, florid face, and a roving black eye. Sir Tancred's gaze rested on him with a malicious satisfaction; he knew all about Mr. Arthur Courtnay.

Presently Lord Crosland's eye fell on that table. "Hullo!" he said sharply. "How on earth comes that boulder Courtnay to be dining with the Wigrams?"

"Like to like," said Sir Tancred with a surprising, cheerful animation.

A few mornings later Sir Tancred, Tinker, and Lord Crosland were sitting in the gardens of the Temple of Fortune, and on a bench hard by sat Claire and Courtnay. He was bending over her, talking volubly, in a loverlike attitude, exceedingly offensive in so public a place. To Sir Tancred's shrewd eyes he seemed to be deliberately advertising their intimacy. She was gazing dreamily before her with happy eyes, over the sea. Lord Crosland grew more and more fidgety; and at last he said hotly, "You ought to interfere!"

"Not I!" said Sir Tancred. "I'm not going to interfere. I have enough to do to

keep Tinker out of mischief without acting as dry-nurse to the children of Uncle Bumpkin."

"But hang it all, the man's a regular bad hat!" said Lord Crosland. "He was advised to resign from the Bridge Club, and I happen to know that he is actually wanted in London about a cheque."

"And in Paris, Berlin, Petersburg, Vienna, and Buda-Pesth. Men who speak French as well as he does always are," said Sir Tancred. "Which reminds me, Tinker, your accent is getting too good. The honest English tongue was never made to speak French like a Frenchman. Let up on it a little."

"Yes, sir," said Hildebrand Anne.

"But you ought to do something, don't you know?" said Lord Crosland. "The child's very pretty, and nice, and sweet, and all that. It would be no end of a shame if she came to grief with that bounder Courtney."

"I won't stir a finger," said Sir Tancred firmly, "for two reasons. One, Bumpkin Wigram helped my stepmother spoil my early life; two, if this bounder Courtney has got round Bumpkin words would be wasted. Bumpkin is as dense and as obstinate as any clodhopper who ever chewed bacon."

"But she's a pretty child and worth saving," said Lord Crosland. "What do you think, Tinker?"

"I should think she was rather inexperienced," said Hildebrand Anne, with admirable judgment.

"Solomon, va!" said Lord Crosland, clutching the boy's ribs, and drawing from him a sudden yell.

"Well, come along; we have a hard day's work before us," said Sir Tancred; and the two of them rose and strolled off towards the Temple of Fortune.

They left Tinker sitting still and thoughtful, the prey of a case of conscience. He knew the story of his father's marriage, his separation from his wife by the action of Lady Beauleigh and Sir Everard. He had been trained to detest them, and to believe any revenge on them a mere act of justice. But his dead mother was but a shadowy figure to him, and this girl was very charming, and sweet,

and kind, for he had had a long talk with her one evening, and she had shared a box of chocolates with him. Did those chocolates constitute the tie of bread and salt between them which his father had taught him was so binding? He wished to help the girl, therefore he made up his mind that they did. With a sigh of satisfaction he rose, sauntered up to the absorbed lovers, and began to parade up and down before them. His nearness put something of a check on the eloquence of Mr. Arthur Courtnay, and every time Tinker's shadow fell on them he looked up and frowned.

At last he said, "Go away, my lad, and play somewhere else."

"I don't want any cheek from a hairdresser's assistant," said Tinker with blithe readiness.

There is nothing so wounding as the truth, and Courtnay knew that he was weak about the hair; he never could bring himself to keep it properly cropped; it was so glossy. His florid face became quickly florider, and he cried, "You impudent young dog!"

"Do not speak to me until you've been introduced. You're always forcing your acquaintance upon someone, Roland Macassar," said Tinker.

It was again the wounding truth; and Courtnay sprang up and dashed for him. Tinker bolted round a group of shrubs, Courtnay after him. Finding him unpleasantly quick on his feet Tinker bolted into the shrubs. Courtnay plunged after him right into a well-grown specimen of the flowering cactus. It brought him up short. He began to swear, and though he could have sworn with equal fluency and infelicity in French, German, or Italian, in the depth of his genuine emotion he returned to the tongue of his boyhood, and swore in English. When he came out of the shrubs, adorned on one side of his face and both hands with neat little beads of blood, he found that Claire had risen from her seat, and was looking shocked, surprised, and worst of all, disgusted. He did not mend matters much by mixing his apologies with threats of vengeance on Tinker; but his temper, once out of control, was not easily curbed. He made a most unfortunate impression on her; the beads of blood scarcely excited her pity at all.

Meanwhile Tinker had taken advantage of his pursuer's meeting with the cactus to leave the terrace swiftly. He went back to the Hôtel des Princes, and took out Blazer for a walk, and as he walked, his seraph-like face glowed with

the pleasantest complacency. Blazer did not like Monte Carlo at all; for him there was no sport and little exercise in it; Tinker liked it very much. He had made many friends in it, and enjoyed many amusements, the chief a pleasant, perpetual war against the heavy, liveried guardians of the gambling rooms. It was his opinion that people came to Monte Carlo to gamble; it was the opinion of the Société des Bains de Mer de Monte Carlo that children ought not to be admitted to the tables. They asserted their opinion; and Tinker asserted his, with the result that his bolt into the Salles de Jeu and his difficult extrication from them by the brawny, but liveried officials was fast becoming one of the events of the day. Sometimes Tinker would make his bolt from the outermost portal; sometimes, with the decorous air of one going to church, he would join the throng filing into the concert room, and bolt from the midst of it. The process of expulsion was always conducted with the greatest courtesy on either side; for his bolt had become an agreeable variety in the monotonous lives of the guardians; they never knew when or in what fashion it would come next.

Now he had another occupation, the shadowing of Mr. Arthur Courtnay. That florid Adonis never grew used to hearing a gentle voice singing softly:

"Get your hair cut! Get your hair cut!"

or,

"Oh, Tatcho! Oh, Tatcho!
Rejoice, ye bald and weary men!
You'll soon be regular hairy men!
Sing! Rejoice! Let your voices go!
Sprinkle some on your cranium!
What, ho! Tatcho!"

The poetry was vulgar; but long ago his insight into the heart of man had taught Tinker to attack the vulgar with the only weapon effective against them, vulgarity.

Sooner or later, whether he was walking, or sitting with Claire, those vulgar strains would be wafted to Mr. Arthur Courtnay's ears, and they injured his cause. They kept alive in the girl's mind an uneasy doubt whether her father was right in asserting Arthur Courtnay to be one of the nicest fellows he had ever met, a veritable gentleman of the old school, an opinion founded on the fact that

Courtney was the only man who had ever given two hours' close attention to his views on Protection.

But, for all this lurking doubt, Courtney's influence over her was growing stronger and stronger. He was forever appealing to her pity by telling her of the hard and lonely life he had lived since his father, a poor gentleman of good family, had died in exile at Boulogne. Really, his father, a stout but impecunious horse-dealer of the name of Budgett, certainly in exile at Boulogne owing to a standing difference with the bankruptcy laws of his country, was alive still. But Arthur was very fond of himself, and once in the mood of self-pity, he could invent pathetic anecdote after pathetic anecdote of his privations which would have touched the heart of a hardened grandmother, much more of a susceptible girl. She fell into the way of calling him "King Arthur" to herself.

He devoted himself to winning her with an unrelaxing energy, for she had forty thousand pounds of her own.

But he cared very little for her, and sometimes he found his love-making hard work. She was not the type of girl whom he admired; her delicacy irritated him; he preferred what the poet has called "an armful of girl," buxom and hearty. Often, therefore, when she had gone to bed, he would refresh himself by a vigorous flirtation with Madame Séraphine de Belle-Île, a brisk and vivacious young widow, who affected always gowns of a peculiarly vivid and searching scarlet. And this self-indulgence proved in the end the ruin of his fine scheme of establishing himself in life on a sound monetary basis.

Tinker was about to get into bed one evening, and found himself slow about it. His conscience was worrying him about some duty left undone, and he could not remember what the duty was. Of a sudden his terrible omission flashed into his mind: in his patient application to the task of shadowing and annoying Mr. Arthur Courtney he had forgotten his daily bolt into the gambling rooms. Reluctant, but firm, he slipped on his pumps and went downstairs. Four minutes later the feverish gamblers in the Salles de Jeu were gratified by the sight of a seraph-like child in blue silk pyjamas who flew gaily round the tables pursued by two stout and joyfully excited Southern Europeans in livery. The pursuit was lively, but short, for Tinker ran into the arms of a wily croupier who had slipped from his seat, and unexpectedly joined the chase. He was handed over to his pursuers and conducted from the rooms, amidst the plaudits of the gamblers. He bade good-night to his liveried friends on the threshold of the Casino,

congratulating them on their increasing efficiency in "Le Sport," and warm, but happy with the sense of one more duty done, he strolled into the gardens to cool.

The pursuit was lively, but short.

[Illustration: The pursuit was lively, but short.]

He was noiseless in his pumps, and coming quietly round a clump of shrubs, he caught Mr. Arthur Courtnay in the act of trying to kiss Madame de Belle-Île with a fervour only justified by the most romantic attachment.

"Oh!" said Tinker reproachfully; and even more reproachfully he began to sing:

"Coupez vos cheveux! Coupez vos cheveux!"

With an execration which was by no means muttered, Mr. Arthur Courtnay sprang up. Tinker darted away, and Courtnay followed. They pelted through the gardens, Courtnay gaining; but as he passed a couple of gendarmes standing in front of the Casino, Tinker yelled: "Gare le voyou! Gare le voyou!" Instinctively the gendarmes flung themselves before Courtnay, and his impetus brought the three of them to the ground with some violence.

With one fleeting glance behind, Tinker scudded on to the hotel, and once safely in his room abandoned himself without restraint to convulsions of inextinguishable delight. When he recovered his habitual calm, he saw that Fortune had given him a weapon with which he might save his cousin.

Mr. Arthur Courtnay and the gendarmes picked themselves up; he made his explanations, and wisely compensated them for the bruises they had received in his fall. Then giving no more thought to Madame de Belle-Île, who sat awaiting him eagerly, he returned gloomily to his hotel, reflecting on the carelessness which had delivered him into the hands of an indefatigable imp of mischief. The upshot of his reflection was a resolve to press his wooing to an immediate conclusion. The next day and the day after, therefore, he redoubled his lamentations that the smallness of his means prevented him from going, as his natural honesty dictated, straight to Claire's father, and asking for her hand, and protested that he dare not risk the loss of her, which would work irreparable

havoc in his life. It was only another step to suggest that, once they were married, her father's strong liking for him would soon bring about their forgiveness. He pressed and pressed these points, pausing at times to declare the vastness of his affection for her, until at last, against her better judgment, and in spite of a lurking distrust of him, of which she could not rid herself, she yielded to his persistence and the overwhelming influence of his stronger personality, and consented to elope with him.

Two days later, as Tinker, Sir Tancred, and Lord Crosland were at déjeuner, Claire and Courtnay passed them on their way to the gardens.

"I shouldn't wonder if those two ran away together," said Lord Crosland; and his cheerful face fell gloomy.

"They have the air," said Sir Tancred coolly.

"Look here, you ought to interfere, don't you know? You ought, really," said Lord Crosland, who had fallen under the fascination of Claire's fresh charm.

"Why don't *you*?" said Sir Tancred.

"Well," said Lord Crosland uncomfortably, "I did go to Sir Everard, and tell him to keep an eye on Courtnay; and he as good as told me to go to—Jericho."

"Just like Bumpkin," said Sir Tancred contemptuously. "I'll bet you a fiver they bolt to-night—by the train *des décaqués*."

"I don't want to bet about it," said Lord Crosland very gloomily.

Their talk made Tinker thoughtful. It would have been easy enough to settle the matter by revealing Courtnay's injudicious display of affection towards Madame de Belle-Île, but that was not Tinker's way. He had a passion for keeping things in his own hands, and a pretty eye for dramatic possibilities. Besides, he had taken a great dislike to Courtnay, and was eager to make his discomfiture signal.

At half-past four in the afternoon he knocked at the door of Madame de Belle-Île's suite of rooms, and her maid conducted so prominent a figure in Monte Carlo society straight to her mistress.

Madame de Belle-Île, having just changed from a bright scarlet costume into a brighter, was taking her afternoon tea before returning to the tables.

"Bonjour, Monsieur le Vaurien," she said with a bright smile. "Have you at last succeeded in gambling?"

"No; it would be no pleasure to me to gamble unless your bright eyes were shining on the table," said Tinker with a happy recollection of a compliment he had overheard.

"Farceur! Va!" said the lady with a pleased smile.

"I came to ask if you would like to sup with Mr. Courtnay to-night?" said the unscrupulous Tinker.

"Ah, le bel Artur!" cried the lady. "But with pleasure. Where?"

"Oh, in the restaurant of the hotel," said Tinker.

The lady's face fell a little; she would have preferred to sup in a less public place, one more suited to protestations of devotion.

"At about eleven?" she said.

"At half past," said Tinker. "And I think he'd like a note from you accepting—it—it would please him, I'm sure. He—he—could take it out, and look at it, you know." It was a little clumsy; but, though he had thought it out carefully, it was the best that he could do.

"You think so? What a lot we know about these things!" said Madame de Belle-Île with a pleased laugh; and she went forthwith to the *écritoire*, and in ten minutes composed the tenderest of billets-doux. Tinker received it from her with a very lively satisfaction, and after a few bonbons, and a desultory chat with her, escorted her down to the Casino.

The rest of the day seemed very long to his impatience, while to Claire, harassed by vague doubt and real dread, it seemed exceedingly short. When the hour for action came, she braced herself, by an effort, to play her part; but it was with a sinking heart that she stole, thickly veiled, and bearing a small hand-bag, out of the hotel and down to the station. She was far too troubled to notice that

she was followed by two guardian angels in the shape of a small boy and a brindled bull-terrier.

Courtney met her on the top of the steps which lead down to the station; and when she found him in a most inharmonious mood of triumph, she began, even so early, to repent of her rashness. Then went down to the station as the train *des décaqués*, the train of the stony-broke, steamed in; and they settled themselves in an empty first-class compartment. Her heart seemed to sink to her shoes as she felt the train move. Then the door opened, and, hauling the panting Blazer by the scruff of his neck, Tinker tumbled into the carriage.

Claire gave a great gasp of relief: the sight of him gave her a faint hope of escape; his presence was a respite. Tinker lifted Blazer on to the seat between him and Courtney, crying cheerfully, "I thought I'd just missed you! I've got a note for you from Madame de Belle-Île, and I knew she'd never forgive me if I didn't give it to you!"

Courtney's florid face had already lost a little colour at the mere intrusion of his inveterate persecutor that alone presaged disaster; at his words his eyes displayed a lively, but uncomfortable tendency to start out of his head. "I don't know what you mean!" he stuttered. "I don't know Madame de Belle-Île!"

"You don't know Madame de Belle-Île!" cried Tinker in well-affected amazement and surprise. "Why, only three nights ago I saw you trying to kiss her in the gardens!"

"It's a lie!" roared Courtney.

"The Beauleighs don't lie," said Tinker curtly.

For the moment, breathless with rage, Courtney could find no words, and Claire, very pale, stared from one to the other with startled, searching eyes.

"At any rate, here's her letter," said Tinker stiffly, holding it out over Blazer's back.

Claire stooped swiftly forward and took the letter. "I am the person to read that letter," she said with a spirit Courtney had never dreamed of in her. "It is my right!"

She tore it open, and had just time to read "Mon Artur adoré," when Courtney, with a growl of rage, snatched it from her, and tore it into pieces, crying, "I will not have you victimised by this mischievous young dog! It's an absurd imposition! I claim your trust!"

But the doubt of him which had lurked always in the bottom of Claire's heart had sprung to sudden strength; she looked at him with eyes that were veritably chilling in their coldness, and, turning to Tinker, she said, "Is it true?"

"It is—on my honour," said Tinker.

There was a quivering movement in Claire's throat as she choked down a sob: she rose, and walked down the carriage to the seat opposite Tinker, farthest from Courtney. Slowly collecting his wits, Courtney grew eloquent and ran through the whole gamut of the emotions proper to the occasion: honourable indignation, and passion so deep as to be ready to forgive even this heart-breaking distrust. She listened to him in silence with an unchanging face, her lips set thin, her sombre eyes gazing straight before her.

Suddenly despair seized Courtney, and he gave the rein to the fury which he had been repressing with such difficulty. "At any rate, I'll be even with you, you young dog!" he cried savagely. "I'm going to throw you out of the train!"

"Oh, no; you're not!" said Tinker pleasantly. "By the time you've thrown Blazer out there won't be enough of you left to throw me out."

Courtney jumped up with a demonstrative hostility; Tinker hissed; with an angry snarl Blazer drew in his tongue and put out his teeth, and Courtney sat down. For a while he was silent, seeking for an object to vent his rage on; they could hear him grinding his teeth. Then he burst out at Claire, taunting, jeering, and abusing.

"That's enough!" cried Tinker angrily. "Pstt! Pstt! At him, Blazer! At him!"

For a few seconds Courtney tried fighting, but his upbringing in France had not fitted him to cope with a heavy bull-terrier. When the train ran into the station at Nice, he was out on the footboard, on the further side, yelling lustily.

"Come on quick, before there's a fuss!" cried Tinker, catching up Claire's handbag, and opening the door. They jumped down, Tinker whistled Blazer, and

the three of them bustled along the platform.

"I've no ticket!" gasped Claire, who every moment expected Courtney to be upon them.

"I thought of that! I've got one for you!" said Tinker; and before Courtney had quite realised that the train had stopped, they were out of the station.

Tinker hurried his charge along the line of fiacres, and stopped at a victoria and pair.

"Holà, cocher!" he said. "From the Couronne d'Or? Wired for to drive a lady and a boy to Monte Carlo?"

"Oui, monsieur!" cried the driver, gaily cracking his whip.

They scrambled in; and the horses stepped out. Tinker knelt on the seat, looking back over the hood. They were almost out of sight of the station when he fancied that he saw a hatless figure run out of it into the road. It might have been only fancy; they were so far off he could not trust his sight. Three minutes later he dropped down on the seat with a sigh of relief. "That's all right!" he said.

"Oh," said Claire, "how can I ever thank you? You've saved me—oh, what haven't you saved me from!"

"A bad hat—a regular bad hat," said Tinker gravely.

"You wonderful boy!" she cried, threw her arms around his neck and kissed him.

Tinker wriggled uncomfortably. He often wished that there were not quite so many women in the world who insisted on embracing him.

"Well, you're a kind of cousin, you see," he said by way of defence.

After a while Claire cooled from her excitement to the cold understanding of her folly. Then she grew, very naturally, bitterly unhappy, and to his horror Tinker heard the sound of a stifled sob.

"I think, if you'll excuse me," he said hurriedly, "I'll go to sleep." And,

happily for his comfort, his pretence at slumber was soon a reality. It was no less a comfort to Claire: she had her cry out, and felt the better for it.

When the carriage drew up before the Hôtel des Princes, they found an excited group about the doorway. Sir Everard Wigram was the centre of it, raging and lamenting. He had missed his daughter, and with his usual good sense was taking all the world into his confidence. Lord Crosland and Sir Tancred stood on one side; and it is to be feared that Sir Tancred was enjoying exceedingly the distress of his enemy.

"Leave the bag to me! I'll give it to you to-morrow," whispered Tinker as the horses stopped. "Say we've been for a drive. I shan't split!"

As Claire stepped out of the carriage, her father rushed up to her, crying, "What does this mean? Where have you been? What have you been doing?"

"Oh," said Claire coolly, raising her voice that all the curious group might hear, "I've been for a drive with Cousin Hildebrand. I couldn't find you to tell you I was going." And taking out her purse, she stepped forward to pay the coachman.

Tinker, keeping the bag as low as he could, slipped through the group. Lord Crosland hurried after him, and caught him by the shoulder. "Where have you really been?" he said. "What happened? Where's Courtney?"

"I've been for a drive with my cousin," said Tinker, looking up at him with eyes of a limpid frankness.

"Ah, let's see what you've got in that bag."

"Can't. It's locked," said Tinker shortly.

"Well, never mind. I owe you fifty pound," said Lord Crosland joyfully.

Tinker stopped short and his face grew very bright. "Do you?" he said. "I think I should like it in gold—a fiver at a time."

CHAPTER TEN

TINKER'S FOUNDLING

On the following afternoon Tinker met Madame de Belle-Île hurrying out of the hotel in a scarlet travelling costume.

At the sight of him she stopped short and cried, "Have you heard the sad news?"

"No; what sad news?" said Tinker.

"About poor Monsieur Courtney! He has had an accident; he is laid up at Nice, ill among strangers! I go; I fly to nurse him!"

"Nurse that brute!" said Tinker quickly. "That—that is a waste of kindness."

Madame de Belle-Île's face fell, and then flushed with anger. "You are a horrid and detestable boy!" she cried angrily.

"Oh, no! I'm not! It's quite true," said Tinker quietly, and he looked at her seriously. He wanted to warn her; then he saw that he could not do so without revealing Claire's secret. "I wish I could tell you about him," he went on. "But I can't. He really is a sweep!"

"You are an impertinent little wretch!" she said, and left him.

"Au revoir," said Tinker gently.

But she only tossed her head, and hurried on. Yet Tinker's honest expression of opinion had impressed her: she had a belief in the instinct of children generally and, like most people who came into contact with him, she had a strong belief in the instinct of Tinker. She tried to forget his words; but they kept recurring to her, and in spite of herself, unconsciously, they put her on her guard.

Tinker watched her out of sight, then he had half a thought of telling Claire that she had gone to Courtney, doubtless at his summons. But he saw quickly that there was no need, and dismissed the thought from his mind. Also, he kept out of his cousin's way for some days; he had a feeling that,—however grateful she might be to him, the sight of him, reminding her of how badly Courtney had

behaved, would be unpleasant to her.

However, he watched her from a distance, and saw that she was pale and listless. Then he saw with great pleasure that Lord Crosland contrived to be with her a good deal, that he even neglected the system for her. But for all this pleasure, he was not quite easy in his mind; the knowledge that he had done his grand-uncle Bumpkin the service of saving him from such a son-in-law as Courtney was a discomfort to him: he felt that this was a matter which must be set right, and he kept his eyes open for a chance. He looked, too, for the return of Courtney and Madame de Belle-Île; but the days passed and they did not return.

One morning he found himself in an unhappy mood. It seemed to him that his wits had come to a standstill; for three days no new mischief had come the way of his idle hands, and his regular, dally, mischievous practices had grown so regular as almost to have acquired the tastelessness of duties. The peculiar brightness and gaiety of Monte Carlo life had begun to pall upon him. Loneliness was eating into his soul; for of all the French boys who paraded the gardens of the Temple of Fortune, he could make nothing. Their costumes, which were of velvet and satin and lace, revolted him; their lack of spirit, their distaste for violent movement, their joy in parading their revolting costumes filled him with wondering contempt. As for the little French girls, he was at any time uninterested in girls; and these spindle-shanked precocities walked on two-inch heels, and tried to fascinate him with the graces of mature coquettes. His careful politeness was hard put to it to conceal his distaste for their conversation. Possibly he was hankering after a healthier life; but at any rate he, who was generally so full of energy, had mooned listlessly about the gardens all the morning, with a far-away look in his eyes, and the air of a strayed seraph.

During his mooning about he had passed several times a little girl who looked English. She sat on a seat in the far corner—a strange, shy, timid child, watching with a half-frightened wonder the strikingly-dressed women and children who strolled up and down, chattering shrilly. He gave her but indifferent glances as he passed; but, thanks to his father's careful training of his natural gift of observation, the indifferent glance of that child of the world took in more of a fellow-creature than most men's careful scrutiny. He saw that she was frail and big-eyed, that her frock was ill-fitting and shabby, her hat shabbier, her shoes ready-made, that she wore no gloves, and that her mass of silky hair owed its unsuccessful attempts at tidiness to her own brushing. He summed her up as that archetype of patience, the gambler's neglected child.

Just before he went to his déjeuner, he saw that she was sitting there still. He took that meal with his father and Lord Crosland; and instead of hurrying off, directly he had eaten his dessert, to some pressing and generally mischievous business, he sat listening to their talk over their coffee and cigars, and only left them at the doors of the Casino. He strolled along the terrace, moody and disconsolate, able to think of nothing to amuse him, and, as he came to the end of the gardens, he saw a group of French children gathered in front of the seat on which the little girl was sitting, and, coming nearer, he heard jeering cries of "Sale Anglaise! Sale Anglaise!"

In a flash Tinker's face shone with a very ecstasy of pure delight, and he swooped down on the group. The child was clutching the arm of the seat, and staring at her tormentors with parted lips and terrified eyes. For their part, they were enjoying themselves to the full. They had found a game which afforded them the maximum of pleasure, with the minimum of effort; and just as Tinker swooped down, a cropped and bullet-headed boy in blue velvet threw a handful of gravel into her face. She threw up her hands and burst into tears; the children's laughter rose to a shrill yell; and with extreme swiftness Tinker caught the bullet-headed boy a ringing box on the right ear and another on the left. The boy squealed, turned, clawing and kicking, on Tinker, and, in ten seconds of crowded life, had learned the true significance of those cryptic terms an upper-cut on the potato-trap, a hook on the jaw, a rattler on the conk, and a buster on the mark. He lay down on the path to digest the lesson, and his little friends fled, squealing, away.

The little girl slipped off the seat and said "Thank you," between two sobs.

Tinker's face was one bright, seraphic smile as he took off his hat, and, with an admirable bow, said, "May I take you to your people?"

The bullet-headed boy rose to his feet and staggered away.

"Uncle's still in that big house," said the little girl, striving bravely to check her sobs.

"That's a nuisance," said Tinker thoughtfully; "for we can't get at him."

"I think he's forgotten all about me. He often does," said the little girl, without any resentment; and she dusted the gravel off her frock.

"I might bolt in and remind him."

"They won't let us in—only grown-ups," said the little girl. "Uncle tried to get them to let me in; but they wouldn't."

"They're used to letting me in," said Tinker—"and hauling me out again," he added. "It brightens them up. You tell me what he's like."

Being a girl, the child was able to describe her uncle accurately: but when she had done, Tinker shook his head:

"He must be just like a dozen other Englishmen in there," he said. "And they wouldn't give me time to ask each one if he were your uncle."

The little girl sighed, and said, "It doesn't matter, thank you," and, sitting down again on the seat, resumed her patient waiting, drooping forward with eyes rather dim.

Tinker studied her face, and his keen eye told him what was wrong.

"Have you had déjeuner?" he said sharply.

"No-o-o," said the little girl reluctantly.

"Then you've had nothing since your coffee this morning?"

"No, but it doesn't matter. Uncle is rather forgetful," said the little girl, but her lips moved at the thought of food as a hungry child's will.

"This won't do at all! Come along with me. It's rather late, but we'll find something."

Her face brightened for a moment; but she shook her head, and said, "No, I mustn't go away from here. Uncle might come back, and he would be so angry if he had to look for me."

Tinker shrugged his shoulders, turned on his heel, and was gone. She looked after him sadly. She would have liked him to stay a little longer; it was so nice to talk to an English boy after ten days in this strange land; and he seemed such a nice boy. But she only drooped a little more, and stared out over the bright sea

with misty eyes, composing herself to endure her hunger.

Tinker went swiftly to the restaurant of the Hôtel des Princes, where the waiters greeted him with affectionate grins, and, addressing himself to the manager, set forth his new friend's plight, and his wishes. The manager fell in with them on the instant, only too pleased to have the chance of obliging his most popular customer; and, in five minutes, Tinker left the restaurant followed by a waiter bearing a tray of dainties, all carefully chosen to tempt the appetite of a child. They took their way to the gardens, and the little girl brightened up at the sight of the returning Tinker. But when the waiter set the tray on the seat, she flushed painfully, and though she could not draw her hungry eyes away from the food, she stammered, "T-t-thank you very m-m-much. B-b-but I haven't any money."

Tinker gave the waiter a couple of francs, and bade him come for the tray in half an hour. Then he said cheerfully, "That's all right. The food's paid for; and whether you eat it or not makes no difference. In fact, you may as well."

The child looked from his face to the food and back again, wavering; then said, with a little gasp, "Oh, I am so hungry."

Tinker took this for a consent, put some aspic of *pâté de foie gras* on her plate, and watched her satisfy her hunger with great pleasure, which was not lessened by the fact that, for all her hunger, she ate with a delicate niceness. He had feared from her neglected air that her manners had also been neglected. After the aspic, he carved the breast of the chicken for her, helped her to salad, and mixed the ice water with the *sirop* to exactly the strength he liked himself; after the chicken, he helped her to meringues, and after the meringues lighted the kirsch of the *poires au kirsch*, which he had chosen because it always pleased him to see the kirsch burn, and ate one of the pears himself, while she ate the others. When she had finished her little sigh of content warmed his heart.

He put the tray behind the seat, and settled down beside her for a talk. Now that she was no longer hungry, she was no longer woebegone, and her laugh, though faint, was so pretty that he found himself making every effort to set her laughing. They talked about themselves with the simple egoism of children; and he learned that her name was Elsie Brand; that she was ten years old—nearly two years younger than himself—that her mother had died many years ago, and that she had lived with her father in his Devonshire parsonage by the sea till last

year, when he, too, had died. Then her Uncle Richard had taken her away to live with him in London. Her story of her life in London lodgings set Tinker wondering about that Uncle Richard, and piecing together the details Elsie let fall about his late rising, his late going to bed, his morning headache and distaste for breakfast, he came to the conclusion that he was a bad hat who lived by his somewhat inferior wits.

At the end of her story he tried to persuade her to come to the sea with him and seek amusement there. But he failed; she would not leave the seat. He gathered, indeed, from her fear of vexing her uncle that that bad hat was in the habit of slapping her if she angered him, and, for a breath, he was filled with a fierce indignation which surprised him; she looked so frail. But he did not ask her if it were so, for his delicacy forewarned him that the question would provoke a struggle between her loyalty and her truthfulness. He entertained her, therefore, with his reminiscences, and enjoyed to the full the admiration and wonder which filled her face as he talked. Absorbed in one another, they paid no heed to the passing of the hours; and the sudden fall of twilight surprised them.

They began to speculate whether Uncle Richard had had enough of his gambling, and would come and fetch her. But, even now, Elsie was not impatient, so inured had she been to neglect. She only looked anxious again. Tinker, on the other hand, was impatient, very impatient, with Uncle Richard, whom he was disposed to regard as a gentleman in great need of a kicking. Moreover, the chill hour after sunset, so dangerous on that littoral, was upon them, and he considered with disquiet the thin stuff of the child's frock.

Presently he said abruptly, "I've promised my father to wear an overcoat during the fever hour. I must be off and get it, and a wrap for you. You won't be frightened, if I leave you alone?"

"No," Elsie said bravely, but her tone belied the word.

"Well, walk up and down quickly, so that you don't get a chill. If you keep near the seat, your uncle can't miss you if he comes."

"Very well," said Elsie, rising obediently. "Only—only—if you could get back soon."

"I will," said Tinker, and he bolted for the hotel.

Elsie walked up and down, trying to feel brave, but the odd shapes which the bushes assumed in the dim light daunted her not a little, and she strove to drive away the fancy that she saw people lurking among them. Tinker was gone a bare seven minutes; but to the timid child it seemed a very long while, and she welcomed his return with a gasp of relief.

He wore a smart, close-fitting brown racing overcoat, which reached to his ankles; and for her he brought his fur-lined ulster.

"Here I am," he said cheerfully. "Get into this," and he held out the ulster.

She put her arms into the sleeves, and he drew it around her and buttoned it up.

"You are a kind boy," she said, with a little break in her voice. A sudden strong but inexplicable impulse moved Tinker; he bent forward and kissed her on the lips.

While you might count a score the children stood quite still, staring at one another with eyes luminous in the starlight. Elsie's face was one pink flush, and Tinker was scarlet.

"That—that was a very funny kiss," she said in a curious voice.

"Oh, what's a kiss?" said Tinker, with forced bravado, consumed with boyish shame for the lapse.

"I—I—liked it," said Elsie. "No one has kissed me since father died." And her breath seemed to catch.

"Girls like kissing," said Tinker in a tone of a dispassionate observer. Then he seemed to thrust the matter away from him with some eagerness: and, slipping her arm through his, he said, "Come on, let's walk up and down."

They walked up and down, chattering away, till eight o'clock. Then he said, "My father will be expecting me; he dines at eight. Won't you come too?"

"No, no, thank you. I must wait for Uncle Richard; I must really." But her arm tightened round his involuntarily.

Tinker thought a while. The gardens were brighter now. The stars were shining with their full radiance, and the lamps were alight, so that even their retired corner was faintly bright.

"Well, you go on walking up and down. You won't feel so lonely as sitting still, and I'll be back as soon as I can;" he said, and off he went.

He found his father and Lord Crosland beginning their soup, and, sitting down, he told them of Elsie's plight. They were duly sympathetic; and his father at once gave him leave to take some dinner to her, and dine with her. Thereupon, after a brief but serious conference with the manager, Tinker departed, again followed by a waiter with a tray. Elsie had not looked for his return for a long while; and she was indeed pleased to be so soon freed from the struggle against her timidity.

They ate their dinner with great cheerfulness and good appetite, and for an hour after it they chattered away happily. Then Elsie grew drowsy, very drowsy, indeed, and presently, nestled against Tinker, she fell asleep. Fortunately, the southern night was warm, and, in the fur-lined ulster, she could take no harm. He sat holding her to him, listening to her breathing, looking out over the sea, and revolving many memories and more schemes, till, at last, the lights began to dance before his eyes, and he, too, fell asleep.

He knew no more until he was awakened by someone shaking his arm, and found his father and Lord Crosland standing over them.

The lamps of the Casino and the gardens were out; only the dim starlight lighted the scene. The two children sat up and stared about them—Elsie sleepily, Tinker wide awake.

"We've found you at last. Hasn't your little friend's uncle come for her?" said Sir Tancred.

"No one has come," said Tinker.

Sir Tancred and Lord Crosland looked at one another.

"Desertion," murmured Lord Crosland softly.

"Well, come along," said Sir Tancred cheerfully. "We must put her up for to-

night."

The children slipped off the seat; Tinker put Elsie's arm through his, and, holding her up when she stumbled over the long ulster, followed his father and Lord Crosland.

There were some empty bedrooms in their corridor, and Elsie was settled for the night in one of them.

Tinker awoke next morning, very cheerful at the thought of having a companion to join in his amusements. He made haste to knock at Elsie's door, and bid her come out for a swim before their coffee. She was soon dressed and found him waiting for her. She flushed a little as she greeted him, and he greeted her with a seraph's smile.

"I thought you'd like a bathe before our coffee," he said.

"It would be nice," said Elsie wistfully. "But my hair—it is such a trouble, even without being wetted by sea-water."

Tinker looked at the fine silky mass of it, and said with sympathetic seriousness, "I saw it was beyond you; but we'll manage."

He caught her hand, they ran down the stairs, out of the hotel, and most of the way to the beach. Then he took her to a lady's bathing-tent, and instructed the attendant to provide Elsie with the prettiest costume she had; changed himself, and in five minutes they were in the sea. To his joy, he found that she could swim nearly as well as he. But he was very careful of her, and the moment she looked cold he took her ashore.

They came back to the hotel very hungry; and Tinker led the way through the passages at the back of the hall, down into the hotel kitchen, where he was welcomed with affectionate joy by the kitchen staff. The end of a long table had been laid with the finest napery and plate of the hotel; they sat down at it, and were forthwith served with an exquisitely cooked dish of fresh mullet, wonderful hot cakes, and steaming cups of fragrant *café au lait*. As he breakfasted, Tinker conversed with the chattering staff with a cheerful kindness and a thorough knowledge of all their private concerns, keeping Elsie informed of the matters under discussion by such phrases as "It's Adolphe's wife; she beats him;" or, "Lucie has consulted a fortune-teller, who says she is going to marry a

millionaire;" or, "Jean's eldest daughter has just made her first communion; they say she looked like a pretty little angel." But he did not tell her of the chaffing congratulations heaped on him on the prospect of his settling down with his beautiful blonde demoiselle. He accepted them with a smile of angelic indulgence.

When they had done they went upstairs; and, on the way, Tinker said, "I must have a shot at that hair of yours; it—it really gets on my nerves."

"It's no use," said Elsie with her ready flush. "I brush it as well as I can; but I can't do it very well, there's such a lot of it."

"Well, I'll do what I can," said Tinker, and he measured with thoughtful eye the silken mass, tangled and matted by the sea-water.

He led the way into his room, and set her in a chair, took off his coat, turned up his sleeves, took his hair brushes, and began upon it. It was his first essay as coiffeur, but his natural and trained deftness stood him in good stead. He kept a watchful eye on her face in the glass, and whenever it puckered, brushed more gently; but, at times, in his absorption in his task, he so far forgot himself as to hiss like a groom cleaning a horse. In the middle of it Sir Tancred came in, and it was significant that he saw Tinker's occupation without a smile, made no joke upon it, but seemed to take it as the most natural thing in the world that his son should be discharging a function of the lady's maid. He greeted the children gravely, sat down, and watched the brushing with a respectful attention. Now and again he asked Elsie a question, which seemed too idle to be impertinent, but her answers told him all he wished to know; and presently he felt, with Tinker, that her uncle was a gentleman in great need of kicking.

It was his first essay as coiffeur.

[Illustration: It was his first essay as coiffeur.]

At last Tinker had finished; Elsie rose with a luxurious sigh, and he looked at his work with fond pride. It was very beautiful, fine hair; and its sheen of changing light well repaid him for his trouble. Sir Tancred proposed that they should stroll down to the Casino, and find her uncle. Lord Crosland joined them in the hall and went with them. When they came to the Casino, they found a little crowd already gathered about its doors, waiting for them to open.

But Richard Brand was not in it, and at once Elsie's face grew anxious. As soon as the doors opened, Sir Tancred went in to ask if her uncle has made any inquiries about Elsie, or left word where she might find him. In ten minutes he came out again and said, "No; he has made no inquiries. Suppose you stroll with Elsie along towards the Condamine, Crosland; that is the way he would come. Tinker and I will wait here."

Lord Crosland looked at his face, said, "Come along, missie," and strolled off with the anxious child.

When they were out of hearing, Sir Tancred said, "I'm afraid the child is in a bad mess. This disgusting uncle of hers lost every penny at roulette last night; and the authorities, with their usual kindness, took his ticket to London, and put him in the train with twenty-five francs in his pocket."

"What a cad!" said Tinker shortly.

"Well, she is on our hands, and we must look after her till we can make arrangements—deposit her in a home or something."

Tinker said nothing for a while; he seemed plunged in profound thought. He kicked a little stone ten yards away; then raised his eyes to his father's face and said, in the firm voice of one whose mind is made up, "I should like to adopt her."

"Adopt her?" said Sir Tancred with some surprise.

"Yes; I should like to, very much."

"Well, thanks to your industry in the matter of flying-machines and stolen children, you have a nice little income, so we needn't consider the question of expense. You can afford it. But in what capacity would you adopt her—as father, uncle, guardian, or what? The formalities must be observed."

"I think as a brother," said Tinker.

Sir Tancred thought a while, then he said, "You will find it a great responsibility."

"Yes; but I don't mind. I—I like her, don't you know!"

Sir Tancred's stern face relaxed into one of his rare and charming smiles. "Very good," he said. "You shall adopt her."

"Thank you, sir," said Tinker, and his smile matched his father's. "And may I have some money to dress her? Her clothes are dreadful."

"They are," said Sir Tancred; and, taking out his notecase, he gave him a thousand-franc note.

"Thank you," said Tinker, beaming. "I'll break it to her about her uncle."

He hurried off towards the Condamine, and overtaking Elsie and Lord Crosland, told her that it was all right, that they had arranged to take care of her for a few days, and carried her away to fetch Blazer, for his morning walk. It is to be feared that he gave her the impression that her uncle had been a party to the arrangement, but by a flood of talk he diverted successfully her mind from the matter. From an unworthy jealousy Blazer was at first disposed to sniff at Elsie, but when he found that she joined heartily in the few poor amusements the place afforded an honest dog, he became more gracious. The children made their déjeuner with Sir Tancred and Lord Crosland, and after it, having restored the reluctant Blazer to his lodging in the basement of the hotel, they took the train to Nice.

Tinker hired the largest commissionaire at the station and bought a small trunk, which he gave him to carry. Then he went straight to Madame Aline's and, having insisted on seeing Madame herself, explained that the bright and elaborate fashions affected by the little French girls would not suit Elsie.

Madame agreed with him, but said, "Simplicity is so expensive."

Tinker waved away the consideration, and showed Madame the thousand-franc note. At once she fell a victim to his irresistible charm, and set about meeting his taste with the liveliest energy, with the result that in less than an hour Elsie was provided with an evening frock of an exquisite shade of heliotrope, an afternoon frock of no less exquisite shade of blue, and a hat, stockings, and gloves to match. They were packed in the trunk, and with them two pairs of shoes, which Madame sent for from a no less expensive bootmaker, and various other garments.

When they came out of her shop, Tinker considered for a while the hole he had made in the thousand-franc note, and said, "The time has come to be economical."

He examined the shops with a keen eye till he came to one which seemed more of the popular kind, and there he bought a frock of serge and three of dark-blue linen, stouter shoes, slippers, and two hats. Here he waited while Elsie changed, and when she came out, looking another creature, he said with a sigh of relief, "I knew you'd look all right if you had a chance."

They had ices at a café, and caught a train back to Monte Carlo. Elsie seemed dazed with her sudden wealth, while Tinker was full of a quiet, restful satisfaction. But it was in the evening that the great triumph came. When she came out of her room in her evening frock, Tinker regarded her for a moment with a satisfaction that was almost solemn, then he turned her round and said, "We match."

"Do you really think so?" said Elsie in an awed voice, with humid eyes.

"There's no doubt about it," said Tinker, with calm, dispassionate, and judicial impartiality.

When they came into the restaurant there was a faint murmur of delighted surprise from the tables they passed; and one stout, but sentimental baroness cried, "Violà des séraphin!"

And truly, if you can conceive of a seraph in an Eton suit, a low-cut white waistcoat, and a white tie, there was something in what she said.

At the sight of them Sir Tancred smiled, and Lord Crosland said, "I congratulate you on your taste, young people."

"It was Tinker's," said Elsie; and she looked at him with a world of thankfulness and devotion in her eyes.

After dinner Tinker was uncomfortable. He felt bound to break to Elsie her uncle's desertion, and he was afraid of tears. With a vague notion of emphasising the difference between her uncle's *régime* and his own, he led the way to the corner of the gardens where they had first met and, standing before the seat on which she had waited so long and hungrily, he said, "I say, don't you think we could do without your uncle?"

"Do without uncle?" said Elsie surprised.

"Yes; suppose, instead of living with your uncle and his looking after you, you lived with us, and I looked after you? Suppose you were to be my adopted sister?"

"For good and all?" said Elsie in a hushed voice.

"Yes."

For answer she threw her arms round his neck, kissed him, and cried, "Oh, I do love you so."

By a splendid effort Tinker repressed a wriggle.

"We'll consider it settled, then," he said.

Elsie loosed him. With a little deprecating cough, and a delicate tentativeness, he said, "About kissing, of course, now that you're my sister you have a right to kiss me sometimes; and—and—of course it's all right. But don't you think you could manage with once a day—when we say good-night?"

"In the morning, too," said Elsie greedily.

"Well, twice a day," said Tinker with a sigh.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

TINKER FROM THE MACHINE

By Elsie's coming into it, Tinker's life was changed. At first she was not only a companion, she was an occupation. A score of little arrangements to secure her greater comfort had to be made, each of them after careful consideration. He was no longer dull: they were together from morning till night; and he found in her a considerable aptitude for the post of lieutenant—to a Pirate Captain, a Smuggler, a Brigand Chief, or a South African Scout. She kept him out of mischief as far as he could be kept out of mischief: the demands her welfare made upon his intelligence prevented his devoting it to the elaboration of ingenious schemes for the discomfiture of his fellow-creatures; and he had to think twice before he flung himself into any casual piece of mischief which presented itself, lest he should involve her in disastrous consequences. On second thoughts he generally refrained with regret. The one practice he did not suffer to fall into desuetude was his daily bolt into the Salles de Jeu; of that she could always be a secure and interested spectator.

For her part, she was entirely happy; she had been so long starved of care and affection that, now she had them, she wanted nothing more; they filled her life.

Taking his responsibility thus seriously, Tinker was greatly exercised in mind whether he should get her a maid or a governess; he could not afford both. Elsie, with absolute conviction, declared that she needed neither; that all she wanted was someone to brush her hair, and she was sure that he did that far better than anyone else would.

Tinker shook his head. "One has to be educated, don't you know?" he said. "Look at me."

It was one of his weaknesses to cherish the conviction that in the matter of learning he lacked nothing, though had he been confronted by even the vulgarest fraction, he would have been quite helpless.

Having at last made up his mind, he sought out Sir Tancred, and said with a

very serious air, "I've been thinking it over, sir, and I've come to the conclusion that I ought to get Elsie a governess."

"My dear Tinker," said his father, "if you add to our household at your present rate, I foresee myself buying a caravan, and traversing Europe in state."

"Like a circus," said Tinker, brightening. "It would be great fun—for a while. I think," he added thoughtfully, "that I could brighten Europe up a bit."

"I do not doubt it," said Sir Tancred politely.

"Well, you see, sir, it's like this," said Tinker. "When I adopted Elsie you said that I was to take all responsibility; and I think I ought to look after her education; it's no good adopting sisters by halves."

"You are right, of course," said Sir Tancred. "But I'm sorry for you. For a boy of nearly twelve, your knowledge of the things taught by governesses is small. Your spelling, now, it is—shall we say phonetic?"

"I don't think a gentleman ought to spell too well any more than he ought to speak French with too good an accent," said Tinker firmly.

"There's a good deal in what you say," said Sir Tancred. "But I'm afraid that when Elsie has learnt geography, say, the position of Schleswig-Holstein and Roumania and Leeds, and other such places to which we should never dream of going, she might look down on you for only knowing the towns on the great railways of Europe and America, and the steamer routes of the world."

"She might. But I don't think she's like that, though, of course, with a girl you never can tell. I think it's more likely she would want to teach me where they are. But she ought to be educated, and I must chance it."

"Well, if you ought, you must," said Sir Tancred. "But one thing I do beg of you; do not have her taught the piano—the barrel-organ if you like, but not the piano."

"No; I won't. A piano would be so awkward to move about—it would want a van to itself."

"I was thinking, rather, of the peculiar noises it makes in the hands of the

inexperienced," said Sir Tancred.

"I know," said Tinker in a tone of genuine sympathy.

Tinker went to Elsie, whom he had left in the gardens of the Casino, and told her that his father had given him leave to get her a governess. On hearing that the matter was so near accomplishment, her face fell, and she said, "Don't—don't you think I ought to help choose her?"

"It wouldn't be regular," said Tinker firmly.

After déjeuner he caught a train to Nice, and went straight to Madame Butler, that stay of those who seek maids, companions, nurses, or governesses on the Riviera. He sent in his card, and was straightway ushered into the office where she received her clients. She was sitting at a desk, and by one of the windows sat a very pretty young lady, who looked as if she were waiting to interview a possible employee. A certain surprise showed itself on the face of Madame Butler at the sight of Tinker; she had plainly expected a client of more mature years.

Tinker bowed, and sat down in the chair by the desk in which clients sat and set forth their needs.

"You wished to see me—on business?" said Madame Butler with some hesitation.

"Yes," said Tinker. "I want a governess for my sister—my adopted sister. I'm responsible for her, and I've decided that she must be educated. I told my father, Sir Tancred Beauleigh, and he gave me leave to get her a governess. So I came to you."

"Yes," said Madame Butler, smiling, "and what kind of a governess do you want?"

The pretty young lady, who had been regarding Tinker with smiling interest, turned away with the proper delicacy, and looked out of the window.

Tinker's face wore a very serious, almost anxious, air. "I've worked it out carefully," he said. "Elsie's ten years old, two years younger than I am, and there is no need for her governess to have degrees or certificates or that kind of thing.

She will only have to teach her to write nicely and do sums—not fractions, of course—useful sums, and some needlework, and look after her when I'm not about. So I want a lady, young, and English; and I should like her to be a bit of a sportswoman, don't you know. I mean," he added in careful explanation, "I should like her to be cheerful and good-natured, and not fussy about the things that really don't matter."

"I think I know the kind of governess you want," said Madame Butler. She ran her eye over two or three pages of her ledger and added, "But I'm very much afraid that I haven't one of that kind on my books at present."

"That's a pity," said Tinker. "Should I have long to wait?"

"I'm afraid you might. People chiefly want ladles with certificates and degrees, so the others don't offer themselves."

The pretty young lady turned from the window with the quickness of one suddenly making up her mind.

"How should I do?" she said in a charming voice.

Madame Butler turned towards her quickly with raised eyebrows, but said nothing. Tinker turned, too, and his face lighted up with an angelic smile. He looked at the pretty young lady carefully, and then at the pretty young lady's tailor-made gown, and the smile faded out of his face.

"I'm afraid," he said sorrowfully, "you would be too expensive."

"What salary were you thinking of giving?" she said with a brisk, businesslike directness.

"Thirty pounds a year," said Tinker; and then he added hastily, "Of course it's very little; but really the work would be quite light, and we should try and make things pleasant for her."

"But surely, for a governess without certificates, that is a very good salary; isn't it, Madame Butler?"

"It is, indeed," said Madame Butler.

"It can't be, really," said Tinker. "But I suppose people are mean."

"Well, it would satisfy me," said the pretty young lady. "But unfortunately I am an American, and you want an Englishwoman."

"I only don't want a foreigner," said Tinker. "I should be awfully pleased if you would take the post."

"The pleasure will be mine," said the pretty young lady. "And about references? I'm afraid I cannot get them in less than ten days."

"Pardon," said Tinker. "Your face, if you will excuse my saying so, is reference enough."

The pretty young lady flushed with pleasure, and said, "That is very nice of you, but your father might think them necessary."

"This is my show—I mean, this matter is entirely in my hands; I look after Elsie altogether. And I think we might consider it settled. My name is Hildebrand Anne Beauleigh."

"Oh, you are the boy who borrowed the flying-machine!"

Tinker was charmed that she should take the right view of the matter; he found that so many people, including the bulk of the English, American, and Continental Press, were disposed, in an unintelligent way, to regard him as having stolen it.

"Yes," he said.

"My name is Dorothy Rayner."

"Rayner," said Tinker with sudden alertness. "There is an American millionaire called Rainer."

"I spell my name with a y," said Dorothy quickly.

Madame Butler once more raised her eyebrows.

"Well, when will you come to us? We are staying at the Hôtel des Princes at

Monte Carlo."

"To-day is Wednesday. Shall we say Saturday morning?"

"Yes, that will do very well. Oh, by the way, I was quite forgetting—about music."

"I'm afraid," said Dorothy, and her face fell, "I can't teach music."

"That's all right," said Tinker cheerfully. "My father was terribly afraid that anyone I got would want to."

He explained to Dorothy their nomadic fashion of life, paid Madame Butler her fee, bade them good-bye, and went his way.

On his return he found Elsie full of anxious curiosity, but his account of his find set her mind at rest. He ended by saying, "It will be awfully nice for you, don't you know? She looked as though she would let you kiss her as often as you wanted to."

"But I shall kiss you just the same, night and morning," said Elsie firmly.

"Of course, of course," said Tinker quickly, and by a manful effort he kept the brightness in his face.

He told his father that he had found a governess.

"References all right?" said Sir Tancred.

"Yes, she carries them about with her," said Tinker diplomatically.

"I suppose I ought to see them, don't you think?"

"You will," said Tinker.

On her arrival on Saturday morning Dorothy found the children awaiting her on the steps of the hotel; and to Tinker's extreme satisfaction, she at once kissed Elsie. When she had been taken to her room, which was next to Elsie's, and her trunks had been brought up, it was time to go to déjeuner, and Tinker conducted her to the restaurant. They found Sir Tancred and Lord Crosland already at table;

they rose at the sight of Dorothy, and Tinker introduced them to her gravely. Sir Tancred was naturally surprised at being suddenly confronted by a startling vision of beauty, when he had expected an ordinary young fresh-coloured, good-natured Englishwoman. But for all the change worked in his face by that surprise he might have been confronted by a vision of corkscrew curls. Lord Crosland, however, so far forgot the proper dignity of a peer as to kick Tinker gently under the table. Tinker looked at him with a pained and disapproving air.

Dorothy was even more surprised by the sight of Sir Tancred. She had given the matter little thought, but had supposed that she would find Tinker's father a sedate man of some fifty summers. When she found him a young man of thirty, and exceedingly handsome and distinguished at that, she was invaded by no slight doubt as to the wisdom of indulging the spirit of whim which had led her to take the post of Tinker's governess, without going a little more into the matter. This uneasiness made her at first somewhat constrained; but Sir Tancred and Lord Crosland contrived soon to put her at her ease, and presently she was taking her part in the talk without an effort.

When she went away with the children, Lord Crosland lighted a cigarette, and said thoughtfully, "Well, Tinker has made a find. She is a lady."

"I should be inclined to say gentlewoman," said Sir Tancred. "Lady is a word a trifle in disrepute; there are so many of them, and so various, don't you know."

"Gentlewoman be it," said Lord Crosland. "But he's a wonderful young beggar for getting hold of the right thing. What a beautiful creature she is!"

"She is beautiful," said Sir Tancred grudgingly.

"Woman-hater! Va!" said Lord Crosland.

Dorothy found herself admitted to a frank intimacy in this little circle into which whim had led her. She spent most of her time with the children. She gave Elsie two hours' lessons a day, and, since she had a knack of making them interesting, Tinker often enjoyed the benefit of her teaching. After lessons she shared most of their amusements, and learned to be a pirate, a brigand, an English sailor, a Boer, and every kind of captive and conspirator. Since she occupied some of Elsie's time, Tinker had once more leisure for mischief; and Dorothy rarely tried to restrain his fondness for pulling the legs of his fellow-creatures, for she found that he had the happiest knack of choosing such fellow-

creatures as would be benefited, morally, by the operation. But she was a check upon his more reckless moods, and kept him from one or two outrageous pranks.

For his part, he found the responsibility of looking after her and Elsie not a little sobering; and he was quite alive to the fact that at Monte Carlo, that place of call of the adventurers of the world, one's womankind need a protecting male presence. Quietly and unobtrusively Sir Tancred seconded him in this matter; if Dorothy had the fancy to take the air in the gardens after dinner, she found that he or Lord Crosland, or both of them, deserted the tables till she went back to the hotel, and strolled with her and the children. She was growing very friendly with the two men, and beginning to take a far deeper interest in Sir Tancred than she would have cared to admit even to herself. His face of Lucifer, Son of the Morning, his perfect thoughtfulness, his unfailing gentle politeness, his melancholy and his very coldness, attracted her; and always watching him, she had now and again a glimpse of the possibilities of energy and passion which underlay the mask of his languor. At times, too, her woman's intuition assured her that, for all his dislike, or rather distaste, of women, she attracted him.

Unfortunately, but naturally, Sir Tancred and Lord Crosland were not the only men who found her beautiful. Monsieur le Comte Sigismond de Puy-de-Dôme, hero of many duels and more scandals, and darling of the Nationalist Press, also saw her beauty. With him to see was to act, and he never passed her without a conquering twirl of his waxed moustache, and a staring leer which he fondly believed to be a glance teeming with passion. Since even he, conscious as he was of his extraordinary fascination, could hardly mistake her look of annoyance for the glow of responsive passion, he resolved on more masterly action. He kept a careful watch, and one afternoon followed her and Tinker and Elsie on one of their walks. They went briskly, and at the end of a mile he was maintaining a continuous, passionate monologue in tones charged with heartfelt emotion on the subject of his tight but patent-leather boots.

A mile and a half on the way to Mentone they turned aside down a road into the hills. He followed them for a while over the loose stones and along the ruts of the roadway with considerable pain, and was on the very point of abandoning the pursuit when he came on Dorothy and Elsie sitting in a shady dell by the roadside, from which the wooded slopes of the hills rose steeply. Careless of his boots and of the fact that they had suffused his face with an unbecoming purple, he strode gallantly up to them, and set about making Dorothy's acquaintance. He began by talking, with an airy graciousness, of the charm of the spot in which he

had found her, and of how greatly that charm was enhanced by her presence. But soon, seeing that she took not the slightest notice of him, that her eyes, to all seeming, looked through him at the trees on the further side of the dell, he lost his gracious air, and began to halt and stumble in his speech. Then he lost his head and plunged into a detailed account of the passion with which Dorothy's beauty had inflamed his heart, wearing the while his finest air of a conqueror dictating terms.

Dorothy surveyed him with a contemptuous wonder, over which her sense of the ludicrous was slowly gaining the mastery; Elsie stared at him. At last he ended the impassioned description of his emotions with a yet more impassioned appeal to Dorothy to fly with him to a far-off shore forever shining with the golden light of love; and Dorothy laughed a gentle laugh of pure amusement.

Count Sigismond flushed purpler; his eyes stood well out of his head; he drew himself up with a superb air—a little spoiled by a wince as his left boot deftly reminded him that he was wearing it, and cried, "Ha! You laugh! You laugh at Sigismond de Puy-de-Dôme! Mon Dieu! You shall learn!" And with a sudden spring he grabbed at her.

She jerked aside, sprang up, and away from him. But he was between her and the exit from the dell; he crouched with the impressive deliberation of a villain in a melodrama for another spring, and Elsie screamed, "Tinker! Tinker!"

Count Sigismond heard a rustling in the bushes above, and looked up to see them parted by an angel child, in white ducks, bearing a bunch of lilies in his hand, who gazed at him with a serious, almost pained face, and leapt lightly down.

With a "Pah! Imbecile!" addressed to himself for delaying, the Count sprang towards Dorothy, was conscious of a swift white streak, and the head of the angel child, impelled by wiry muscles and a weight of seventy-six pounds, smote as a battering ram upon the first and second buttons of his waistcoat. He doubled up and sat down hard in one movement; then turned on his side, and gasped and gasped.

As a battering ram upon the first and second buttons of his waistcoat.

[Illustration: As a battering ram upon the first and second

**buttons
of his waistcoat.]**

"Come along!" cried Tinker in a most imperative tone. "A row is a horrid nuisance when there are women in it!" And he caught his charges, either by an arm, and hustled them out of the dell and down the road.

Dorothy laughed as she ran; never before had she seen vaunting arrogance brought low in so sudden and signal a fashion. At last she stopped, dabbed away the tears of mirth, and said, "Oh, Tinker, I am so much obliged to you! It's all very well to laugh now; but it might have been horrid!"

"It was the simplest thing in the world," said Tinker. Then, rubbing his head ruefully, he added, "I wish those foreigners would not wear gold buttons on their white waistcoats in the daytime. They have no more notion of how to dress than a cat—the men haven't."

They hurried along, looking back now and again to see if they were followed. They were not, for Count Sigismond was now sitting up in the shady dell, staring round it with fishy eyes, and wondering dully whether he owed his disaster entirely to an angel child, or whether Mont Pelée had affected the neighbourhood. He gasped still.

As they drew near the town, Tinker grew thoughtful. Suddenly he stopped, and said seriously, "Now, look here, both of you, we mustn't let my father know about this, or he'll certainly thrash that bounding Frenchman; and that wouldn't be good enough, don't you know."

"It would be very good for him," said Dorothy with some vindictiveness.

"Yes, but not for my father," said Tinker very earnestly, indeed. "For all that he looks like a swollen frog, Le Comte de Puy-de-Dôme is awfully dangerous with the pistol. He's hurt two men badly in duels already."

"Has he?" said Dorothy quickly, and the colour faded in her cheeks. "Then we must, indeed, say nothing about it."

"Swear," said Tinker, raising his right hand.

"We swear," said Dorothy and Elsie in one voice, raising their right hands. It was a formality which had to be gone through many times when they played at being conspirators; their words and action were mechanical.

"That's all right," said Tinker with a sigh of relief.

Count Sigismond returned to his hotel in a very hot fury. His outraged pride clamoured for vengeance, and he sought for someone on whom to be revenged. He was surprised at the end of two days to hear nothing of his discomfiture; but his fury lost nothing by growing cool, and on the third night he picked a quarrel with Sir Tancred.

Next morning Sir Tancred asked Dorothy to take the children to Nice for a few days, since he had heard that there was some fever at one of the smaller hotels. He watched over their departure himself, and Tinker was aware of an indefinable something in his manner which puzzled him. It was, perhaps, that something which gave him a curious, unsettled feeling, as if they were going on a much longer journey. As they left the hotel, Lord Crosland came up from the Condamine carrying a square case under his arm; it did not escape Tinker's observant eye; but in the bustle of their removal he gave it but scant attention. In the evening Dorothy noticed that he was restless and absent-minded, and asked him what was the matter.

"I don't know," he said; "I have a funny feeling as though something was going to happen, and I can't think of anything. It's just as if I'd missed something I ought to have noticed. It always makes me uncomfortable. Yet I can't think what it can be."

She made many suggestions, but to no purpose, and he went to bed dissatisfied. He awoke once or twice in the night—a very rare thing with him; possibly, so close was their kinship, his father's disturbed spirit in some obscure and mysterious fashion was striving to warn him, or prepare him for calamitous tidings. In the early morning he slept soundly, and awoke rather later than was his wont; and, even as he awoke, the square case which Lord Crosland had carried sprang into his mind, and he knew it to be a case of pistols. In a flash everything was clear to him; his father was going to fight Count Sigismond, and had sent him to Nice to be out of the way.

He sprang out of bed, and dashed for his watch; it was two minutes past

seven. They would fight at eight; he had nearly an hour. In three minutes he was dressed, and racing down the stairs. He met Dorothy coming up.

"What's the matter?" she cried at the sight of his white face.

"My father—he's fighting Le Comte de Puy-de-Dôme, and he's got us out of the way!"

He did not see her turn pale, and clutch the banisters; he was racing out of the hotel. He ran to the coach-house, wheeled his bicycle into the courtyard, mounted, and rode down the street. He went at a moderate pace through the town, but once on the Corniche road, he drove the machine as hard as he could pedal.

He was well on his way before his mind cleared enough for him to think what he was doing; and then his heart sank; he could do nothing. He could not interrupt a duel; that was the last enormity. And if he did interrupt it, it would be but for a few minutes; it would take place all the same. As the sense of his helplessness filled him, two or three great tears forced themselves out of his eyes. He dashed them away with a most unangelic savageness; then, conscious only of a devouring desire to be near his father in his perilous hour, he drove on the machine as hard as he could.

The Corniche is a good road, but all up hill and down dale; and he knew how much more time he lost by jumping off and running his bicycle up a hill than he made by letting it rip down the descent. As he drew near Monaco a kind of hopelessness settled on him. He almost wished, since he could not stop it, that he might find the duel over. Now and again a dry sob burst from his overloaded bosom.

It was ten minutes to eight when he came up the slope from the Condamine. His legs were leaden, but they drove on the machine. At last he came to the path which leads to the half glade, half rocky amphitheatre, in which the gentry of the principality, and of the rest of the world who chance to be visiting it, settle their affairs of honour, slipped off his machine, and ran down it as fast as his stiff legs would carry him. A few yards from the end of it he turned aside into the bushes, came to the edge of the glade, saw his father and Count Sigismond facing one another some forty yards away; saw a white handkerchief raised in Lord Crosland's hand, and in spite of himself, his pent-up emotion burst from him in

one wild eldritch yell.

It still rang on the quivering air when the handkerchief fluttered to the ground, and the pistols flashed together.

Now to those who enjoy an intimacy with Tinker, an eldritch yell is neither here nor there. Piercing as this one was, it barely reached Sir Tancred's consciousness; but it smote sharply on Count Sigismond's tense nerves, and deflected the barrel of his pistol just so much as sent the bullet zip past Sir Tancred's ear, as he received Sir Tancred's bullet in his elbow, and started to traverse the glade in a series of violent but ungainly leaps, uttering squeal on squeal.

Tinker turned and bolted, sobbing, gasping, and choking in the revulsion from his hopeless dread. He seized his bicycle, ran it along the road some fifty yards, turned in among the bushes, flung himself down, and sobbed and cried.

There was confusion on the scene of the duel. Count Sigismond's seconds had to chase him, catch him, and hold him while the doctor dressed his wound. Then they fell to a discussion as to whether the eldritch yell had been uttered by the Count or by someone in the wood round the glade; it had fallen upon very ragged nerves, and for the lives of them they could not be sure. Lord Crosland threw no light at all upon the matter, though he did his best to help their dispute grow acrimonious. Sir Tancred preserved the discreet silence of a principal in a duel; the Count Sigismond only moaned.

At last they turned their attention to him, and carried him to the top of the path. Sir Tancred and Lord Crosland started for the town to send up a cab for him.

When they were out of hearing, Lord Crosland said, "Most likely, that yell saved your life, old chap."

"I should say that there wasn't a doubt about it; but, really, in the case of a sweep like Puy-de-Dôme, I can't say that I mind a little irregularity. Besides, my conscience is quite clear. Heaven knows I did my best to keep Tinker in the dark and at a distance."

"It can't be done," said Lord Crosland with conviction.

Tinker heard their voices, and by a violent effort, which did him good, hushed his hysteric sobbing. After a while he heard the cab rattle up, and rattle away.

Twenty minutes later he mounted his machine, and, passing through the back streets of Monte Carlo, rode slowly back to Nice. On his way back he washed his face at a spring, and when he mounted his machine again, he said to himself firmly, "I'm *not* ashamed—not a bit."

As he wheeled his bicycle into the coach-house of the hotel, Dorothy ran into it, caught him by the arm, and cried, "Did they fight? Is your father hurt?"

He looked at her white, strained face, and said with a dogged air, "My father's all right. What do you mean about fighting? I—I've been for a ride—on my bicycle."

"Then you did stop it!" cried Dorothy; and before he could ward her off she had kissed him.

"Look here," said Tinker firmly, but gently, "these things won't bear talking about. They won't really."

CHAPTER TWELVE

TINKER BORROWS A MOTOR-CAR

A few days later, early in the afternoon, Sir Tancred was leaning on the wall of the gardens of the Temple of Fortune, smoking a cigarette, and looking down on the Mediterranean in a very thoughtful mood. Tinker was by his side, also looking down on the Mediterranean, also silent, out of respect to his father's mood.

Suddenly Sir Tancred turned towards him, and said abruptly, "What did you say you paid your governess?"

"Thirty pounds a year," said Tinker.

"She dresses well," said Sir Tancred.

Tinker turned his head and eyed his father with a trifle of distrust. "She does dress well," he said gravely, "and I can't quite make it out. Sometimes I think that her people must have lost their money, and she bought her gowns before that happened. Sometimes I really think she's only being a governess for fun."

"For fun?" said Sir Tancred. "But I thought her references were all right. Yes; you told me she carried them about with her."

"Well, she has the nicest kind of face," said Tinker; and his own was out of the common guileless.

"Oh! her face was her reference, was it?" said Sir Tancred quickly.

"You can forge references, but you can't forge a face," said Tinker with the air of a philosopher.

Sir Tancred laughed gently. "My good Tinker," he said, "I look forward to the day when you enter the diplomatic service. The diplomacy of your country will be newer than ever. But don't be too sure that a woman can't forge her face."

"There'd be a precious lot of forgery, if they could forge faces like Dorothy's," said Tinker with conviction.

"You seem a perfect well of truth to-day," said Sir Tancred.

They were silent a while, gazing idly over the sea; then Tinker said, "I'm beginning to think that Dorothy is rather mysterious, don't you know. She gets very few letters, but lots of cablegrams, from America. She has lots of money, too, and she spends it. Sometimes I have to talk to her seriously about being extravagant."

"You do? What does she say?"

"Oh, she laughs. That's what makes me think she's only a governess for fun. I never knew a girl so ready to laugh—though she did cry that morning." He spoke musingly, half to himself.

"What morning was that?" said Sir Tancred quickly.

"It was a few mornings ago," said Tinker vaguely; and he added hastily, "I think I'll go after her and Elsie; they've gone down the Corniche towards Mentone."

"Was it the morning I had an affair with M. le Comte de Puy-de-Dôme?"

"Ye-e-s," said Tinker with some reluctance, and he prepared for trouble. Hitherto his father had said nothing of that timely but eldritch yell. Now, by his careless admission about the tears of Dorothy, he had opened the matter, and let himself in for a rating.

But Sir Tancred was silent, musing, and Tinker returned to his idle consideration of the Mediterranean.

Presently he said, "She would make you a nice little wife, sir."

Sir Tancred started. "There are times," he said, "when I feel you would take my breath away, if I hadn't very good lungs."

"I thought that that was what you were thinking about," said the ingenuous Tinker.

"If you add thought-reading to your other accomplishments, it will be too much," said Sir Tancred with conviction.

Of a sudden there came bustling round the right-hand horn of the bay a most disreputable, bedraggled-looking vessel. By her lines a yacht, her decks would have been a disgrace to the oldest and most battered tin-pot of an ocean tramp. Her masts had gone, there were gaps in her bulwarks, and the smoke of her furnaces, pouring through a hole in her deck over which her funnel had once reared itself, had taken advantage of this rare and golden opportunity to blacken her after-part to a very fair semblance of imitation ebony, and to transform her crew to an even fairer imitation of negroes dressed in black.

"She is in a mess!" said Tinker.

"Of the Atlantic's making, to judge by its completeness," said Sir Tancred. "Whose yacht is it?"

"I don't know," said Tinker, staring at it with all his eyes.

"You ought to," said Sir Tancred with some severity. "You've been on it. It's Meyer's."

"So it is," said Tinker, mortified. "I am stupid not to have recognised it!"

"Your new clairvoyant faculty must be weakening your power of observation. I shouldn't give way to it, if I were you."

Tinker wriggled.

A hundred yards from the jetty the yacht's engines were reversed; and the way was scarcely off her, when her only remaining boat fell smartly on the water, and was rowed quickly to the steps.

"They seem in a hurry," said Sir Tancred.

For a while they busied themselves in conjectures as to what errand had brought the yacht to Monaco; Sir Tancred lighted another cigarette, and they watched the crew of the yacht set to work at once to wash the decks.

Some twenty minutes later a little group hurried into the gardens, the manager of the Hôtel des Princes, a tall, bearded, grimy man, and a stout, clean-shaven, grimy man. They came straight to Sir Tancred and Tinker, and the bearded man said quickly, "My name is Rainer, Septimus Rainer. I've just learnt that my daughter Dorothy is governessing your little girl. Where is she?"

Sir Tancred bowed, and said languidly, "Miss Rainer is the governess of my son's adopted sister. He is her employer, not I. Here he is."

Tinker stepped forward, and bowed.

Septimus Rainer stared at him with a bewildered air, and said, "Well, if this don't beat the Dutch!" Then he added feverishly, "Where is she? Where's my little girl? Where's Dorothy?"

"She went with Elsie—that's her pupil—down the Corniche towards Mentone after déjeuner," said Tinker.

"Take me to her! Take me to her at once, will you? She's not safe!" said Rainer quickly.

"Not safe! Come along!" said Sir Tancred; and his languor fell from him like a mask, leaving him active and alert indeed.

"It's like this," said Rainer as they hurried through the gardens. "A week ago I got a cable from Paris saying that a kidnapping gang were after Dorothy. I'm a millionaire, and the scum are after ransom. I cabled to McNeill, my Paris agent, to come right here with half a dozen of the best detectives in France, scooped up Mr. Buist of the New York police,"—he nodded towards the short, clean-shaven, grimy man—"borrowed a yacht, and came along myself. Being in a hurry, we had trouble with the Atlantic of course; but I've done it seven hours quicker than steamer and train. Have McNeill and the detectives come?"

"No, they haven't," said Tinker.

"Sure?" said Rainer.

"Quite," said Tinker. "I've seen no one watching over Dorothy; and she has gone about outside the town, in the woods, and down by the sea, just as usual. She knew of no danger, I'm sure."

"Perhaps McNeill didn't want to frighten her, and just set his men to watch over her from a distance," said Rainer.

"Perhaps McNeill is in it," said Sir Tancred drily.

"I'm glad I came right here," said Rainer.

They came out of the gardens, and as they passed the Hôtel des Princes, Tinker said, "Go on down the Corniche! I'll catch you up!" and bolted into it.

He ran upstairs into his father's room, and took from a drawer the pocketbook which held their passports; ran into his own room, and thrust into his hip-pocket the revolver he could use so well, into other pockets five hundred francs in notes and gold. Then, sure that he had provided against all possible emergencies, he ran smiling down the stairs.

As he came out of the front-door, his eyes fell on a lonely, deserted motor-car.

In a breath he had pitied its loneliness, seen its use, and jumped into it. He set it going, and in three minutes caught up his father, Rainer, and the detective. Sir Tancred jumped into the seat beside him, Rainer and the detective into the back seat.

"Whose car is this? How did you get it?" said Sir Tancred.

"I commandeered it," said Tinker firmly. "And I was lucky too; it's a good car."

"I suppose there'll be a row about it. But we've got to use it," said Sir Tancred.

"Oh, no! there won't," said Tinker cheerfully. "When we come back, everyone but me can get out. I'll take it back, and explain things."

For a mile Tinker sent the car along at full speed. Then he slowed down, and pulling up at every opening into the hills or down to the shore, sent a long coo-ee ringing down it. No answer came back. At the end of two miles his face was growing graver and graver, and its gravity was reflected in the faces of the three men. At the end of two miles and a half he stopped the car, and said, "They can't have gone further than this."

"Just too late," muttered Septimus Rainer; and they looked at one another with questioning eyes.

"Well, there's no time to be lost," said Sir Tancred. "Mr. Buist had better hurry back to Monte Carlo, to the Hôtel des Princes, in case we've missed them. We will go on hard, and he can wire to us, if they come back to the hotel, at Ventimiglia."

"That's all very well," said the detective with a sudden air of stubbornness. "But I don't like the look of the business. It's a curious thing that Miss Rainer, the daughter of a millionaire, should be a governess in your family. I don't understand it. There is a chance, and I'm bound to consider it, of your being mixed up with this kidnapping gang. What's to prevent you kidnapping Mr. Rainer?"

Sir Tancred's eyes flashed, and he looked as though he could not believe his ears. Tinker laughed a gentle, joyful laugh.

"I mean no offence, sir," said the detective with some haste, at the sight of Sir Tancred's face. "But I'm bound to look at it all ways."

"Just as you like," said Sir Tancred quietly. "Let Mr. Rainer go back, or both of you go back. Only be quick!"

The millionaire had watched the faces of father and son with very keen eyes while the detective had been speaking: "Off you go, Buist!" he broke in. "I know where I am! Go, man! Go!"

The detective jumped out of the car, and Sir Tancred said, "Go to M. Lautrec at the Police Bureau at Monte Carlo. He's the best man to set things moving. Tell him to wire as far as Genoa: there's nothing like being on the safe side." And Tinker started the car.

Two miles further on they came upon a peasant woman tramping slowly along, with a heavy basket on her head. Tinker stopped the car, and Sir Tancred asked her if she had seen a lady and a little girl walking on the Corniche between that spot and Monte Carlo. She said she had not seen a lady and a little girl walking, but a mile out of Monte Carlo she had seen a lady and a little girl in a carriage with two gentlemen; and the horses were galloping: oh, but they did gallop; they had nearly run over her. The young lady had cried out to her as they passed. She had not caught what she said; she had thought it a joke.

"It looks very like them: we had better follow this carriage. What do you think, Mr. Rainer?" said Sir Tancred. "Of course they may be back at the hotel by now, and we may be on a wild-goose chase."

"I guess we can afford to be laughed at; but we can't afford to lose a chance," said the millionaire.

"They passed this woman a mile out of Monte Carlo, and we're four miles and a half out," said Tinker. "She doesn't walk above three miles an hour with that basket: they're an hour and twenty minutes ahead."

"You're smart, sonny," said the millionaire.

"Right away!" said Sir Tancred: and he tossed a five-franc piece to the woman.

Tinker set the car going, and began to try his hardest to get her best speed out of her.

The millionaire leaned forward, and said to Sir Tancred, "The scum are hardly up-to-date to use a carriage instead of a motor-car."

"What I don't see is how they are going to get them across the frontier. It looks—it looks as if the Italian police were in it," said Sir Tancred, frowning.

"Do you mean to tell me that the Italian police would connive at kidnapping?" said the millionaire.

"No: but some rascal of a detective, who could pull a good many strings, might be in it. At any rate if they get them across the frontier undrugged, the authorities are squared or humbugged. What I'm afraid of is that they're making for that rabbit-warren, Genoa. If they get them there, we may be a fortnight finding them."

"I guess I'll squeal before that," said the millionaire; "yes, if I have to put up a million dollars."

The car had reached a speed at which they could only talk in a shout, and it seemed no more than a few minutes before Tinker slowed down for Mentone, and stopped at a gendarme. Before saying a word Sir Tancred showed him a twenty-franc piece; and the gendarme spoke, he was even voluble. Yes, he had seen a carriage, rather more than an hour before. It had galloped through the town. It carried fever-patients for the hospital at Genoa, ill of the bubonic plague. The police and the custom-house officials had been warned by wire from Monte Carlo and Genoa not to delay it. There were relays of horses every twenty miles to Genoa: the wires had said so.

"That was how they crossed the frontier, was it? What fools these officials are!" said Sir Tancred, and he gave the gendarme his Napoleon: and bade him tell his superior officer that the police had been humbugged.

"If they're really bound for Genoa, we can catch them and to spare—bar accidents," said Tinker cheerfully. "Besides, M. Lautrec will have wired to look out for them." And he set the car going.

"Oh, they're bound for Genoa, sure enough," said Sir Tancred. "But they

won't enter it in that carriage, or much before daybreak. Still the rascals don't know that you've come, Mr. Rainer, and that we're already on their track. That ought to spoil their game."

The car ran through Mentone, and into Ventimiglia, but as it drew near the custom-house, Sir Tancred cried, "By Jove, we're going to be delayed! The guard's turned out!" And sure enough, a dozen soldiers barred the road.

Tinker stopped the car: and a sergeant bade Sir Tancred and Mr. Rainer come with him to the officer in command. Tinker gave his father the pocketbook which contained their passports; the two of them got out of the car, and followed the sergeant into the custom-house.

Tinker jumped down, and sure that he had plenty of time, looked at the machinery and filled up the petrol tank from a gallon tin in the back of the car. Then he went back to his seat.

He could hear a murmur of voices from the custom-house, and it grew louder and louder; he caught disjointed scraps of angry talk. Of a sudden his father's voice rose loud in apparent fury, and he cried in Italian, "Spies! We're nothing of the kind!" and then in English, "Bolt!"

In a flash the car was moving, and half a dozen soldiers sprang forward, crying, "Stop! Stop!"

"It's running away!" screamed Tinker in Italian, and switched it on to full speed.

It jerked forward; and the soldiers ran heavily after it.

"Hold it back! Hold it back!" screamed Tinker, and with the unquestioning obedience of the perfectly disciplined man, a simple young soldier caught hold of the back of the car, and threw all his heart and strength into the effort to stop it, only to find himself running fast. At sixty yards he was running faster and shouting loudly. At eighty yards, he stopped shouting, let go, and fell down. Tinker looked back, and saw him sitting up in the dust and shaking his fist, while forty yards beyond him his fellow-soldiers danced gesticulating in the middle of the road.

"Hold it back!" screamed Tinker.

[Illustration: "Hold it back!" screamed Tinker.]

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

TINKER MEETS HIS OLD NURSE

Tinker let the car rip on, the while he considered what he should do. He was excited, determined, he accepted readily enough the responsibility which had fallen upon him, but he was hardly happy. He could see no hope of rescuing Dorothy and Elsie by himself, even if he caught the carriage; and since he reckoned that it would take his father two or three hours to turn the Riviera upside down, and extricate himself and Mr. Rainer from the extremely neat and effective trap into which they had fallen, he could look for no help from them till far into the night. For a while he suffered from the sense that he had bitten off, or rather had had thrust into his mouth, more than he could chew. Then of a sudden he saw that the really important thing, the dogging the kidnappers, was in his power, and he regained his cheerfulness.

He drove on the car at full speed for ten miles, and inquired of a peasant walking beside a cart loaded with bags of grain, if he had seen the carriage. The peasant had seen it; he was vague as to how long ago, and how far away, but Tinker was sure that he had seen it. Accordingly, he drove on the car at full speed again. In this way, going at full speed, and now and again slowing down to inquire, he got over a good many miles. He was frightened when he went through a town lest the police should try to stop him, but it seemed that they had received no such instructions from Ventimiglia. All the while he was drawing nearer the carriage, for all that, somewhere or other, it had plainly changed horses.

At last he made up his mind that he would overtake it in the next seven miles; and he bucketed the car along for all she was worth. At the end of the seven miles he had not overtaken it, nor was there any appearance of it on the road

before him, a level stretch of two miles. However, he ran on another five miles, and there was no sign of it, nor had anyone he passed or met, seen it. Plainly he had overshot it.

He turned the car, and came back, stopping to examine branch roads for its wheel-tracks, losing the ground he had made up. Some seven miles back, he came to a road leading to a great gap in the hills. A little girl was feeding a few lean sheep at the corner of it. No: she had seen no carriage; she had only been here a little while: the road ran up to Camporossa. Tinker considered it, and it invited his search. It went high into the hills, and he saw little towns here and there on their sides. He sent the car slowly down it. For seventy yards the roadway was hard, or stony; then came a patch of dust, smooth and unmarked by a wheel-track. Any vehicle going along the road must have passed over it, and a wave of disappointment submerged Tinker's spirit; the road had seemed so very much the right one. He stopped the car, and stared blankly at the patch of dust. Suddenly his quick eye caught a curious marking on its surface. He jumped down, and bent over it: sure enough, the patch had been brushed and smoothed with a bough.

He hurried the car back to the corner of the road, and by entreaties, persuasion, cajoling, a five-franc piece, and even—great concession!—a kiss, he wrung from the little shepherdess a promise that she would wait till dark if need were, stop every motor-car that came from the direction of the frontier, and say, "The kidnappers have gone up this road." He was assured that his father would borrow or hire a motorcar, and follow in it.

Then he turned the car for Camporossa. Three hundred yards up the road he came to another patch of dust, and saw the wheel-tracks of the carriage deep and plain. He sent along the car as hard as he dared, for, as the road grew steeper along the hillside, it grew stonier and stonier, thanks to its serving, like most Italian hill roads, as a watercourse to carry off the rain from the hills. A very slow and painful jolting brought him among the olive groves of Camporossa and into that little town.

He stopped before the little Inn, and was served with milk and bread and fruit. As he ate and drank, he was all affability and information to the group of the curious who gathered round the car. He was an English boy; his family had gone on in front in a carriage, and he was following them in the car. He learned at once that the carriage had gone on to Dolceacqua, and was less than an hour

ahead.

He paid for his food and milk, and without delay sent the car up the steep hillside. He had to nurse and coax it up the steepest parts. After another long jolting he reached Dolceacqua, vexed all the time by the knowledge that the carriage was going as fast as he over such roads. The magnificent view of the Mediterranean from the rose-gardens of Dolceacqua afforded him no pleasure at all; it made only too clear to him the risk he would run, if he recovered Dorothy and Elsie and had to descend that steep at any pace. At Dolceacqua he learned that the carriage was little more than half an hour ahead, on the road to Islabona. He was pleased to hear that, for all the badness of the road, he had gained upon it: plainly the horses were tiring.

Another steep climb brought him up to Islabona, to learn that the carriage had turned to the right along the road to Apricale. To his surprise and satisfaction he found this road smooth, and once more, after long crawling, sent the car along at full speed. It was time to make haste, for the sun was setting. A mile from Apricale he saw a cloud of dust ahead of him, and he knew that he had the kidnappers in sight. He slowed down, for he did not wish to be seen by them. Then when the dust-cloud vanished into the straggling town, he hurried on again, for if they pushed on through the darkness, he would have to follow by the sound of their wheels.

He came through Apricale at a moderate speed. Then a mile beyond it, as he came to the top of a little hill, he saw the carriage moving slowly down an avenue, to a house on the left, some hundred yards from the road. He stopped the car with a jerk, backed it a little way down the hill, and from the brow watched the carriage drive up to the house. Then the sun set, and the swift twilight fell.

He set about filling up the petrol tank, and making sure that the lamp was ready to light. Then he backed the car into a clump of trees, and set out across the fields for the house. It was the dark hour after sunset, and he found most of the bushes thorny. Presently he came into a deserted garden, overgrown with rank weeds and unclipped shrubs. He hoped devoutly that the scorpions and tarantulas would await the passing of the sunset chill in their lairs. To all seeming they did, for he pushed through the garden without mishap, and came to the house. It was a four-square, two-storied building, with something of the air of a fortress, a useful abode in those once brigand-ridden hills, some old-time gentleman's country-seat; a mat of creepers covered it to its tiled roof. The side

near him was dark; and from the back came the voices of three stablemen about their business. He stole round to the front; and that too was dark. But on the further side two rooms were lighted, one on the ground floor, one above.

A chatter of excited voices came from the lower windows; and Tinker came to within ten yards of it, and looked in through the heavy bars. Three men were dining at the table: a freckled redheaded man with the high cheekbones of the Scot, a dissipated young Italian of a most romantic air, and a small, round, vivacious man, ineffably French.

"I'm going to marry the girl, say what you will!" the Italian cried. "Where would your scheme have been without my aid? Where would you have found a house like this, out of the world, secure from search, in a country where everyone is as silent as the grave in my interests?"

"Pardon, my dear Monteleone," said the Frenchman; "*I* am going to marry the lady. Without me, there would have been no scheme for you to help. I made it. I rank first. I marry the young lady."

"What's all this talk about marrying the girl?" roared the Scotchman, in French. "We agreed on a ransom of a million and a half francs, five hundred thousand francs each!"

"The lady's beauty has changed all that," said the Frenchman. "I am going to marry her."

"No, no: it's me; it's me," said the Italian.

"Have done with this foolish talk!" roared the Scotchman, banging the table. "If either of you marries her, the poor young thing will be a widow in a fortnight. I know Septimus Rainer; he'll shoot such a son-in-law at sight!"

"Shoot me! Shoot me! This American mushroom shoot a Monteleone for marrying his daughter!" cried the Italian. "Why, the Monteleones were Crusaders! He'll be proud of the alliance!"

"Very proud—very proud he'll be will Septimus Rainer—when he's shot ye," jeered the Scotchman.

A movement overhead drew Tinker's attention; he looked up, to see Dorothy

leaning out of the window above. He uttered the short click which served him as a signal when he played the part of chief conspirator. She looked straight down at him, but did not move or answer, and he knew that there was someone, an enemy, in the room with her. The kidnappers still disputed vehemently; and he stole up to the wall, and began to climb the vine which covered the side of the house. He disturbed a number of roosting small birds; but Dorothy's suitors were putting forward their pretensions to her hand with a clamour which drowned the flutter of wings. He climbed up and up, and Dorothy never stirred; and at last he looked under her arm into the room. Elsie, with her elbows on the table, was staring miserably at the grim, forbidding face of an elderly woman who sat on a chair backed up against the door.

Tinker looked at the woman and could scarcely believe his eyes, then he laughed gently, slipped over the window-sill, and said cheerfully, "Hullo, Selina, how are you?"

The grim woman started up with a little cry, stared at him, ran across the room, and began to hug him furiously, crying, "Oh, Master Tinker! Master Tinker! What a turn you did give me!"

"Drop it, Selina! Drop it!" said Tinker, struggling out of her embrace. "You know how I hate being slobbered over!"

Then he dodged Dorothy and Elsie, who advanced upon him with one accord and one purpose of kissing him, and cried, "No, no! This is no time for foolery!"

"But I don't understand," said Dorothy.

"Oh! Selina's my old nurse. What are you doing here, Selina? I never expected you to turn kidnapper at your age!"

"Nothing of the kind, Master Tinker! I'm paid to help save these poor lambs from them Popish Jesuits, and I'm going to do it!"

"Let's hear about this," said Tinker, sitting down on the table.

"It's my poor husband's cousin, Mr. Alexander McNeill. He engaged me to come here to act as maid to a young lady he was helping get away from those Jesuits who were trying to force her into a convent to get her money," said Selina.

"You've been humbugged, then. What you are doing is helping to kidnap my adopted sister Elsie, and Miss Dorothy Rainer, the daughter of an American millionaire," said Tinker joyfully.

Dorothy started and flushed. "How did you learn that?" she said quickly.

"Your father's come from America, and he and my father are looking for you, though where they are there's no saying. I left them at Ventimiglia arrested as spies," said Tinker.

"Arrested as spies?" cried Dorothy.

But Selina, whose face had undergone a slow but violent change, broke in, "So Alexander's humbugged me, has he? He's brought me all the way from Paris here by a lie about Jesuits having tried to bury this young lady in one of their nasty convents, to do his dirty kidnapping work, has he? I'll kidnap him! I'll teach him to play these tricks on me!"

"Do!" said Tinker with warm approval. "You let him have it! Think that you're pitching into me like you used to! Come along, all of you! Selina's simply tremendous when her back's up!"

Selina opened the door, and went down the stairs with all the outraged majesty of a Boadicea. The three of them followed her quietly, and at the bottom Tinker bade Dorothy and Elsie unbar the door of the house and himself kept close behind Selina. She opened the door of the room; and at the sight of her the sustained shriek in which the Italian and the Frenchman were conversing died suddenly down, and the three kidnappers stared at her.

"You nasty, body-snatching scum!" said Selina, glowering at them.

"Eh! What? You're daft, woman! What's the matter?" said McNeill.

"Don't you woman me, Alexander McNeill!" said Selina. "Daft, am I? Daft to listen to your lies about Jesuits and the young lady! Daft to believe you when you told me not to listen to her, for the Jesuits had got round her, and she didn't know what was good for her! But I've found you out! I'm going to take the young lady straight back to her father, and send the police here for you."

"Woman, you're mad!" said McNeill, rising with a scared face.

"Don't you woman me, you low Scotchman! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, mixing yourself up with these foreign rascals! You that's had a Christian up-bringing!"

"You do what you're paid to do!" roared McNeill.

"Il faut agir!" said the Frenchman, with the true Napoleonic grasp of the situation, and he bounced in a lithe, over-confident manner at Selina.

In a flash she had her left hand well gripped in his abundant hair, and was clawing his face with her right. He screamed and writhed; and the struggle gave Tinker his chance. He slipped the key out of the inside of the door, thrust it into the outside; as the Frenchman tore himself away yelling, he cried, "Outside, Selina!" strengthened the command by a strong drag on her arm; got her outside; slammed to the door, and locked it almost before the kidnappers had realised that he was there. He wrenched the key out of the lock just as Dorothy had got the front-door open; ran down the hall; caught Elsie's hand, and crying, "Come along! Come along!" ran down the avenue, followed by Dorothy and Selina as fast as they could pelt.

Three minutes brought them to the car; and he bundled his breathless charges into it, drove it out of the clump of trees, and sent it hard down the road. Just before Apricale he bade them crouch down in the car that they might not be seen, and rushed through the ill-lighted street at full speed. A mile beyond the town he lighted the lamp and drove her at full speed again, along the smooth road to Islabona.

Beyond Islabona he was forced to go very slowly down the jolting descent; if he had tried to go at any pace, the car on those loose stones might at any moment have taken its own steering in hand and smashed itself against the rocky banks. Dorothy and Elsie took advantage of the slowness to pour into his ears the tale of how the kidnappers had seized them on the Corniche a mile outside the town, thrust them into the carriage, and kept them quiet by threats. Now and again he hushed them, to listen for pursuing horses. He had not much fear of pursuit. The kidnappers would be some time breaking out of the room in which he had locked them; and when they were out they would scour the neighbourhood on foot. He had kept well out of sight behind Selina; and they would hear nothing of the car before they began to pursue. When they did pursue, it would be on the sure-footed hill horses; they would come three yards to the car's one.

At last they reached Dolceacqua, and pushed steadily and carefully downwards. Half-way between that town and Camporossa, they came round a bend in the road, to see half a mile below them the flaring lamp of a motor-car.

"Here's my father, or the police!" said Tinker with a sigh of relief.

In five minutes Dorothy was kissing her father; and Tinker was presenting the new-found Selina to Sir Tancred with a joyful account of her delinquencies.

It had taken Sir Tancred little more than two and a half hours to get free of the Italian authorities; and as Tinker had expected he had hired a motor-car, and came straight and hard for Genoa, to be turned aside on to the right track by Tinker's shepherdess.

When they had exchanged stories, Mr. Rainer was for going on and taking vengeance on the kidnappers. But Sir Tancred dissuaded him, pointing out that there was no need to have every gossip in Europe talking about Dorothy. If the police, who were in a bustle from Mentone to Genoa, caught them, it must be endured. But Dorothy had escaped unharmed, and the less fuss made about the matter the better.

Mr. Rainer listened to reason; Dorothy got into the car with Sir Tancred and her father; and they continued the descent. Once on the highroad they set out for Monte Carlo as hard as they dared go at night. It was past midnight when they reached the hotel, where Buist was awaiting them in great anxiety. The sight of them set his mind at rest; but to this day he is inclined to believe that Sir Tancred had a hand in the kidnapping of Dorothy, and that Selina was an accomplice. To his intimates he speaks of him with great respect as "a mastermind of crime."

They were all very hungry and they supped at great length, in very good spirits. As they were going upstairs to bed, Tinker succeeded in keeping Dorothy back.

"It's all very well your being the daughter of a millionaire," he said with some severity. "But an employer has his rights. I can't lose a governess who suits Elsie so well, straight off. I shall expect a month's notice."

"But I've no intention of resigning that excellent post," said Dorothy, smiling.

Tinker looked at her gravely, thinking, and then he said gloomily, "Your

father will never let you be a governess. I suppose you expect me to back you up against him."

"That's just what I do expect," said Dorothy.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

TINKER TAKES SEPTIMUS RAINER IN HAND

On awaking next morning Dorothy's first thought was how would her father's coming affect her relations with Sir Tancred; and she at once changed it to how would it affect her relations with the whole of the little circle into which a fortunate whim had led her. She was an honest soul, and now she tried to be as honest with herself as a woman can bring herself to be. She did not hide from herself that of late she and Sir Tancred had been more and more drawn together; she even went to the length of admitting that her feeling for him was something stronger than friendship. Indeed, she was full of pity for him. She had learned from Tinker something of the story of his earlier life, and like a good woman she wished she might give him the happiness he had missed. She did not know how strongly she longed to give him that happiness, much less was she able to distinguish where pity merged into love. Now she was in a great dread of her father's millions. She knew well enough that with many, indeed, with most men of Sir Tancred's class they would have been primroses, very large primroses, on the path of love; she feared that if he was the man she thought him, and she would not have him any other, they would prove barriers on that path, hard indeed to surmount. She dressed in no very good spirits, and came downstairs to find her father awaiting her in the hall, ready to stroll out and hear how the world had gone with her.

Sir Tancred also awoke with the sense of something unpleasant having happened. But at first he could not for the life of him remember what it was. Then he began to consider the change which would be brought about by the irruption of the millionaire. He resented it. He found the prospect of Tinker's losing Dorothy's services exceedingly disagreeable. For a while he ascribed that resentment to the fact that she would cease to be the excellent influence with

Tinker she certainly was; and then he grew resentful on his own account. It was hard, indeed, that he should suddenly be deprived of the presence of so charming a creature at his table, of so delightful a companion of his evening stroll in the gardens of the Casino. If it hadn't been for those confounded millions—there he checked himself sternly; the millions were there, and there was no more to be said, or thought. But his temper was none the better for the constraint.

After his late hours the night before, Tinker did not get up as early as usual, and he and Elsie decided to forego their bathe in the sea, but went straight to breakfast in the kitchen of the hotel. He found the staff greatly concerned about the trouble which was likely to befall him for borrowing the motor-car. It seemed that on finding it gone, its owner, a M. Cognier, had displayed a wrath of the most terrible. Of course an Argus-eyed busy-body had seen Tinker depart in it; and M. Cognier, an Anglophobe, had declared his intention of punishing this insolence of Perfidious Albion by handing him over to the police. Tinker heard all their prophecies of evil with his wonted tranquillity; but he had no little difficulty in setting their minds at rest.

M. Cognier had been impressive.

The two children had finished their breakfast, and were about to set out in search of adventure, when Selina found them and began to set forth a petition. She wished to be allowed to enter Tinker's service again. She was, she said, alone in the world once more, for her husband, having spent all her savings, had with determined Scotch thriftiness incontinently died, and left her to shift for herself. She had been making a mean living as an ironer in a Parisian laundry, when Alexander McNeill had sent for her to Apricale to help him deliver a young lady from the Jesuits; and she saw in her curious meeting with Tinker, at the country seat of the young Monteleone, the finger of Providence pointing the way back to her old situation. Would he lay the matter before his father, and support her petition?

Tinker was somewhat taken aback, and said, "But I'm too old for a nurse."

"Oh, there are lots of things I could do, Master Tinker. There are really," said Selina. "You want a housekeeper when you're at the Refuge, a housekeeper who could get up your linen and Sir Tancred's as they can't do it at Farndon-Pryze. You want someone to look after you, when you've got a cold. You never did take any care of yourself." She was wringing her hands in her earnestness.

"You'd be a sort of valet-housekeeper then," said Tinker, pondering the matter.

"Yes, and I should want very little wages. All I want is to be in your service again. I never ought to have left it. I never had no real peace all the time I was married, what with wondering how you were being looked after, and whether you was ill or not. I always took in *The Morning Post*, though Angus did grumble at the expense, all the time I was in Paris, on purpose to see where you was; and every day I looked at the Births, Deaths, and Marriages first, to see if anything had happened to you."

She stopped; and Tinker was silent a while, thinking; then he said, "Do you think you could act as maid to Elsie?"

"Why, of course I could, Master Tinker!"

"She wants someone to brush her hair most," said Tinker thoughtfully.

"I don't want a maid. And I don't want anyone to brush my hair but you," said Elsie firmly. "No one could do it so well."

"Oh, you'll soon get used to Selina's doing it," said Tinker cheerfully. "And you'll find it so much more—so much more important having a maid of your own. You'll feel so grown-up, don't you know? I tell you what, we'll go upstairs, and Selina can have a try at it, while I talk to my father."

Elsie shook her head doubtfully; but she came. Tinker left them at the door of Elsie's room, and went to his father. He found him dressing, and after bidding him good-morning, came at once to the matter in hand. "Selina wants to come back to us," he said. "She thinks she could be useful as valet-housekeeper and maid to Elsie. She's awfully keen on it."

"If she wants to come back, she most certainly can," said Sir Tancred. "I owe Selina a debt I can never pay—and so do you, for that matter. I don't pretend to know what the functions of a valet-housekeeper are, but doubtless Selina knows her own capabilities best. Besides, as you are losing your governess, you will want some woman about Elsie."

"But I don't intend to lose my governess!" cried Tinker.

Sir Tancred looked at him with unaffected interest. "Am I to understand that you propose to retain the daughter of a millionaire as your adopted sister's governess?" he said.

"Yes," said Tinker firmly. "Dorothy's a very good governess: she suits Elsie and she suits me."

"That sounds like a reason," said Sir Tancred. "But I shall be interested to see if Mr. Rainer listens to it."

"I think," said Tinker thoughtfully, "we shan't have much trouble with Mr. Rainer."

"Of course, if you've made up your mind—but millionaires are kittle cattle."

Tinker went to Selina and Elsie, looked carefully into the matter of hair-brushing; gave Selina a few hints on the process, and then told her that her request was granted. He fled from the room to escape her joyful gratitude; and went down into the hall to await the conclusion of the process, and Elsie's coming.

Of a sudden there descended on him an exceedingly animated French gentleman of forty, who cried, "Tell me then a little, good-for-nothing! Why did you steal my motor-car yesterday?"

Tinker was suavity itself; he protested that he was desolated, grieved beyond measure that the necessity of borrowing the motor-car had been forced on him; but he had borrowed it in the service of a lady; and he told briefly the story of the kidnapping. The aggrieved Frenchman listened to it with a face in which amazement battled with incredulity; but fortunately, towards the end of it, Dorothy and her father came into the hotel from walking in the garden of the Casino; and Tinker introduced the Frenchman to them. At the sight of Dorothy's beauty, he forgot his righteous wrath; forgot that it was an international matter, another instance of the cunning insolence of Perfidious Albion; protested his delight that his car should have been of use to her; would not listen to Septimus Rainer's proposal to fit it out with fresh tires, declaring that the tires on it, worn in her service, had become one of his most cherished possessions; and in the end turned upon Tinker with outstretched arms, and cried, "Embrace me! I have called you a good-for-nothing! But you are a hero!"

With infinite quickness Tinker seized the nearest hand, wrung it warmly, and ducked out of the way of the embrace. Then he explained that unless the police caught the kidnappers, they desired to let the matter drop, for the gossip would be unpleasant to Dorothy. The Frenchman understood; and assured them that as far as he was concerned, it should be buried in the most secret depths of his bosom.

With that he took his leave of them; and on his heels came two Italian detectives to inquire into the kidnapping. Sir Tancred was summoned to the conference; and for all that their questioners assumed a good deal of the air of inquisitors with all the horrors of the torture-chamber behind them, he and Tinker saw to it that they went away very little wiser than they came.

At déjeuner Septimus Rainer told them that now he was in Europe he proposed to stay in Europe, and enjoy a little of his daughter's society. He could carry on all of his business he wanted to by cablegram and letter. One thing, however, he must have, and that was clothes, for in his haste he had come away with a gripsack and nothing more. Sir Tancred suggested that Tinker, who knew his Nice, should take him over there, and put him in the hands of the right tailor, hatter, hosier, and bootmaker; and Septimus Rainer accepted the offer gratefully.

Accordingly the two of them caught a train early in the afternoon, and went to Nice. Septimus Rainer had supposed the getting of clothes to be a simple and tiresome affair of a few minutes; you went to a tailor and said, "Make me suits of clothes," or to a bootmaker and said, "Make me pairs of boots." He was vastly mistaken. He found himself embarked upon a serious business.

He awoke to the seriousness of it in the train, when he found Tinker, who had taken his commission to heart, regarding him with a cold, calculating air, very disquieting. He endured it as long as he could, then he said cautiously, "You aren't measuring me for my coffin; are you, sonny?"

"Oh, no!" said Tinker with a reassuring smile of a seraphic sweetness. "I was only thinking how you ought to be dressed."

"Oh, anything will do for me," said Septimus Rainer carelessly.

"I'm afraid not; you see I'm responsible," said Tinker seriously. "And I was thinking that, getting your clothes here in Nice, I shall have to keep a very sharp eye on them, or they'll go dressing you like a French American—you know, an

American who is dressed by a Paris tailor. And that wouldn't do at all."

"No: of course not," said Septimus Rainer quickly.

But it was not till they came to the tailor's that he realised the full seriousness of the business before them. At first he supposed that he was to have his say in the matter; but at the end of ten minutes, with a half-humorous abandonment, he put himself entirely in the hands of the conscientious Tinker, and indeed had he not done so, there is no saying that he might not have gone about the world parading a velvet collar on a grey frock coat. It was Tinker who decided, after weighty consideration, upon the colour and texture of the stuff of each suit, chose the very buttons for it, and forced upon the reluctant Niçois his ideas of the way each separate garment should be cut. Septimus Rainer was frankly bewildered at the end of half an hour; he was used, in the way of business, to carrying a multiplicity of details in his head, but these details it could not carry. When he found that Tinker had them at his finger ends, he was filled with admiration and respect.

From the tailor's they went to the hatter's; and there Septimus Rainer found himself trying on hats by the score. But, strangely enough, he did not grow weary: Tinker's absorbed interest in his task was catching to the point that at the hosier's the millionaire found himself discussing the shade of his socks with real enthusiasm.

When they came out of the last shop Tinker said, with the deep breath of one relieved of a heavy responsibility, "There—I think you'll look all right—as far as a French tailor can do it."

"I ought to, after all the trouble you've taken, sonny," said Septimus Rainer, smiling.

"You have to take trouble about dressing a man. A woman is easy enough. I got Elsie her clothes in about an hour. But a man is much more difficult. And clothes are so important," said Tinker gravely.

"I suppose they are—over here," said Septimus Rainer.

"I'm glad you don't take them really seriously," said Tinker, approving his tone, "because you'll soon get into the way of wearing them when you've got them. It's very funny, but well-dressed Americans—men, I mean—don't often

wear their clothes properly; they look as if they felt so awfully well-dressed. I don't think you will."

"Now you've told me about it, I'll try not to."

"I think you'll want a good man, though, to keep you up to the mark. You might get slack, don't you know?"

"No, no; I can't have a valet, and I won't," said Septimus Rainer firmly.

"Ah, we shall have to see what Dorothy says about that," said Tinker with a smile of doubtful meaning.

"That's playing it rather low down on me, isn't it?" said Septimus Rainer reproachfully. "It's—it's coercion."

"Oh, if you have to wear clothes, you may as well do it thoroughly. You see, it's been put into my hands, and I must go through with it," said Tinker apologetically.

The millionaire gazed at him ruefully.

"And now," Tinker went on, regarding him with another cold, calculating air, that of a proprietor, "I think I'll take you to a hair-dresser, and have your hair and beard dealt with."

"Crop away! crop away!" said the millionaire.

Tinker took him to a hair-dresser, and told the man exactly how he wanted the hair and beard cut. "He'd make you a French American, too, if I let him," he said to Septimus Rainer.

When the hair-dresser had done, the millionaire looked at himself in the glass with approval, and said, "Well, I do look spick and span, though gritty; yes—sir."

"You'll look better when you have your clothes," said Tinker. "And, now, I think you must want a drink."

"That is so, sonny. This is dry work, this getting clothes."

Tinker took him to a café, adorned with an American bar. Septimus Rainer lighted a cigar and refreshed himself with the whiskey sour of his native land; Tinker ate ices. Over these agreeable occupations they talked; and the millionaire derived considerable entertainment and no little instruction from his young companion's views of life on the Mediterranean littoral, illustrated from the passing pleasure-seekers.

Over these agreeable occupations they talked.

[Illustration: Over these agreeable occupations they talked.]

When they got into the railway carriage on their return, he lighted another cigar, and lay back in the seat with the content of a man who had done a hard day's work. But presently he roused himself and said, "I've been thinking about those kidnapping scum. They were going to ransom Dorothy for three hundred thousand dollars, you said."

"Yes, a million and a half francs," said Tinker.

"Well, sonny, I've been thinking I must pay you fifty thousand dollars over that business. You took a big risk holding up a gang like that."

"It wasn't me: Selina held them up," said Tinker quickly.

"Selina did her share, and I shan't forget it. But it was your show. I think fifty thousand dollars would be fair."

Tinker's face went very grave. "Thank you very much," he said slowly, "but I couldn't take any money for helping Dorothy out of a mess. When I've taken money for helping people, they've been strangers—like the Kernabies and Blumenruth. But Dorothy is different—quite different."

Septimus Rainer pulled at his beard, and said in a grumbling voice, "That's all very well, sonny; but where do I come in? You get my little girl out of a tight place—a very tight place—and you save me three hundred thousand dollars. Business is business, and I ought to pay."

"It is rather awkward for you," said Tinker, looking at him with a puzzled face and knitted brow. "But I think the thing is that it wasn't business. I like Dorothy—I like her very much. She's a friend. And there can't be any business

between friends, don't you know?"

"Shake, sonny," said the millionaire, holding out his hand. "I'm glad you and she are friends."

Tinker shook his hand gravely.

When they came back to the hotel, at the sight of her father, Dorothy cried, "Oh, papa, what have you been doing? You look ten years younger. And what a nice shape your head is!"

"Yes," said Septimus Rainer, "I pride myself on the shape of my head. But it's all your young friend's doing."

"Wait till his clothes come," said Tinker with modest pride.

"I shall look fine in those clothes, I tell you—fine," said Septimus Rainer, and his air was almost fatuous.

"I think he ought to have a valet," said Tinker. "You can't learn about clothes all out of your own head. Either you must have always worn the right clothes, or you want someone to teach you."

"Of course, you must have a valet, papa," said Dorothy.

"I can't—I can't have a man messing about me," said Septimus Rainer in a tone of almost pathetic pleading.

"I'm afraid there's no way out of it," said Tinker firmly.

"I'm sure there isn't if Tinker says so. He knows all about these things," said Dorothy. "You must be brave, papa: you really must."

"I'll find him one," said Tinker.

Septimus Rainer yielded with a gesture of hopeless resignation.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

TINKER ASSERTS THE RIGHTS OF THE EMPLOYER

Septimus Rainer was very soon admitted to the frankest intimacy of the little circle. An American of the best type, he had enjoyed the advantage in his childhood of the stern and hardening training of life on a little farm, and the supreme advantage of a good mother. He had fought his way to fortune with clean hands, winning always his battles by sheer superiority of brain, never by laxity of principle; no man could lay to his charge that he had dealt him a foul blow. He had come, therefore, through that demoralising fight with a clean heart, his native shrewdness increased a thousand-fold, his native simplicity unabated. It was this combination of shrewdness and simplicity which had caused him to send Dorothy, bitter as it had been to part with her, to Europe to finish her education. His gorge had risen at the intolerable snobbishness which is corroding the wealthy sections of American society; he had made up his mind that she had a better chance of obtaining the necessary social acquirements, while remaining a gentlewoman, in Europe; and had acted with great success on the conviction.

After a few days' natural restlessness he found himself developing an admirable capacity, very rare in millionaires, of being for a while idle. This agreeable circumstance was the natural effect of the surroundings in which he found himself; not so much of the place, for at Monte Carlo pleasure is a somewhat strenuous affair, but of the fact that his new friends had a trained power of taking life easily. Tinker, Sir Tancred, and Lord Crosland would have admitted him to their intimacy for the sake of Dorothy; but simple souls themselves, they recognised in him a kindred simplicity, and admitted him to their friendship. He possessed, to a great degree, the American adaptability; and it is not surprising that he fell into their way of taking life easily. It was only for the time being. The millionaire is a good deal of the Sindbad, and he must bear the burden and go the way of the golden Old Man of the Sea he has made for himself. But Septimus Rainer enjoyed this respite from the tyranny of his millions with the whole-hearted pleasure of a child. He enjoyed the brightness and glitter of the place; he enjoyed the pleasant meals and pleasant talks with pleasant companions; he enjoyed a little gambling at the tables; and he enjoyed with a childlike zest playing with Dorothy and the children, displaying latent and unsuspected talents for piracy, brigandage, and conspiracy, which were no less a glory than a surprise to him. Indeed, at times he was very like a young schoolboy

let loose after many hours' school.

Tinker was of perpetual interest to him, and he listened with greedy ears to the wisdom of the world of that sage, on the rare occasions when some matter or other set it flowing from his lips. On the other hand, he found in him an absorbed listener to the stories of his less involved financial battles, and spared no pains to make them clear to him. Sir Tancred interested him little less, and he was always deploring the loss the splendid army of millionaires had suffered by his excellent abilities not having been forced to flow in a business channel.

He was distressed, too, about the waste of Tinker, and adjured his father to hand him over to him to be made a millionaire of.

But Sir Tancred turned a deaf ear to his petition, and said, "Of course, if Tinker went into business he would become a millionaire. And it's a fashionable occupation, and I've nothing to say against it. But over here, with some of us, there are still other things besides money—not that there will be long—and for my part I shall be content if he grows up a gentleman, as he will. Business might spoil that; and at any rate I won't chance it. And, after all, my step-mother won't live to much more than eighty, so that he will have thirty thousand a year before he's forty-five."

"That's a hundred and fifty thousand dollars," said Septimus Rainer thoughtfully, and he pressed the point no more.

He was far too shrewd not to perceive the attraction Sir Tancred and Dorothy had for one another, and he regarded it with entire content. Whatever he might have said against Sir Tancred's manner of life, he had a genuine respect for his qualities; and he had learned from Dorothy something of the causes of his falling into that manner of life. He had a strong belief that once married to her he would change; he thought it likely that he might even embark on the career of politics, which he understood to be, in England, a quite respectable pursuit. He was aware, of course, that he could easily buy her an English peer or a foreign Prince for husband. But Sir Tancred's rank and birth satisfied his simple tastes; and he was quite sure that he might ransack the English peerage and the Courts of Europe without finding her as good a husband. He did not perceive that his millions barred Sir Tancred's path.

Dorothy perceived it only too soon. She found the growth of her intimacy

with Sir Tancred checked; it did not lessen, indeed, but it did not increase. A shadow had fallen across it, and he no longer talked to her in the tone of half-affectionate familiarity he had grown to use with her, he was more reserved. She chafed at it, but she was not greatly downcast; she only wished that the kidnappers had had the grace to leave her in her part of the penniless governess, a few weeks longer. She felt that, then, all the millions in the world would not have barred Sir Tancred's way. Indeed, she had no reason to be greatly downcast. This sudden setting of her out of his reach had inevitably increased her attraction for Sir Tancred; it had deepened his liking to a far stronger feeling. He cursed the unkindly Fates, and told himself that his only course was to fly; that the more he saw of her, the more painful would that flight be. But he could by no means constrain himself to forego the delight of her presence; and, though he never let a word of his love escape his lips, his eyes and the tones of his voice told her of it often enough.

Tinker was not long providing Septimus Rainer with a carefully chosen English valet, whom he found a pleasant, unassuming fellow, very easy to get on with. Then the millionaire began to talk of engaging a secretary, for his millions were beginning to make themselves troublesome; and he begged Tinker, since he had found him so unembarrassing a valet, to keep his eyes about him for a secretary also; but Tinker said that Monte Carlo was no place to find secretaries who understood business.

One morning he saw Madame Séraphine de Belle-Île drive up to the hotel. She wore a mournful air; and he perceived at once that she was no longer clad in a bright scarlet costume, but in one of a dull crimson, more in keeping with her air of mournfulness. She cut him deliberately as she passed into the hotel.

He was exceedingly angry; no human being had ever cut him before, and he flushed with mortification. He walked down to the gardens pondering the affront; and his anger grew. Then of a sudden it flashed on him that she had found out Mr. Arthur Courtnay, and that the warning he had given her had had something to do with that discovery. She had cut him by way of showing her gratitude in a truly womanly fashion. With the smile of an angel indulgent to human frailty he forgave her, and thrust the matter out of his mind.

That night at dinner, or rather at dessert, Lord Crosland informed them that he was engaged to Claire Wigram; and when they had done congratulating him, he told them that in a few days he would be leaving for England with the Wigrams.

"Well," said Sir Tancred, "the season here is coming to an end; and, at any rate, the weather for the last few days has been too hot to do these children any good. I think we will move northward, too."

"It will be the break-up of a very pleasant party," said Septimus Rainer with a sigh, and Dorothy's face fell.

"Why should it break up?" said Lord Crosland. "You'd better all come."

"No; I'm not coming to England, yet," said Sir Tancred. "After all this heat it would be too great a risk to face straight away the bitter English summer. I thought of moving northward gently to Biarritz, or I have a fancy for Arcachon. Wednesday would be as good a day as any."

There was a pause; then Tinker said thoughtfully, "Wednesday is rather soon, sir." And, turning to Dorothy, he said, "Do you think that you could pack by Wednesday? Of course, it doesn't really matter, for you could come on after us; but I don't want Elsie to lose a day's work."

Septimus Rainer, Sir Tancred, and Lord Crosland looked a little taken aback; it struck them all three with the same sense of oddness that a small boy should direct the movements of the daughter of a millionaire.

"Oh, I can easily pack up by Wednesday," said Dorothy, as if it were a matter of course that he should direct her movements.

"That's all right," said Tinker.

"But I don't understand," said Septimus Rainer. "Has Dorothy bound herself to do as you tell her?"

"Well, I suppose she has, as far as teaching Elsie goes. And I explained when she took the post that we travelled about a good deal," said Tinker carelessly.

"But I can't have this," said Septimus Rainer.

"Well, she can always give me a month's notice, and then the engagement ends," said Tinker. He was prepared for the discussion, and resolved that his father and Dorothy should not be separated as long as he could prevent it.

"Do you mean she isn't free for a month from now? But—but it's absurd!" said Septimus Rainer.

"That's what the papers call the rights of the employer," said Tinker with a singularly sad sweetness.

"Oh, you wouldn't insist on that right, not if you were asked nicely, would you?" said Lord Crosland.

"Oh, yes, I should!" said Tinker cheerfully. "You see, I'm responsible for Elsie, and she will never get such a good governess as Dorothy again. So she must have as much of her as possible."

"Thank you; it's nice to be appreciated," said Dorothy, smiling at him.

"Ah," said Septimus Rainer with the air of one who has found a solution of the problem, "but Dorothy can always forfeit a month's salary in lieu of notice."

"Oh, I couldn't think of it, papa!" cried Dorothy. "I should lose—I should lose five pounds!"

"This beats the Dutch! This is avarice! I allow you four thousand dollars a month!" said Septimus Rainer.

"Ah, but this is my own earned money!" Dorothy protested, flushing and smiling.

Suddenly there came a twinkle into Septimus Rainer's eye. "Well," he said, "if you're ground down under the heel of a grasping employer, you're ground down, and you must go to Arcachon. But I shall come, too."

"Of course," said Tinker. "You're—you're one of the family."

"Thank you," said Septimus Rainer. "I'm told that you English are slow about it. But when you make a man at home, you do make him at home. And I've always wanted to be adopted."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

TINKER DISOWNS HIS GRANDMOTHER

On the eve of their departure for Arcachon, Tinker and Elsie were sitting in the gardens of the Temple of Fortune, taking a well-earned rest after a farewell bolt into the Salles de Jeu, in which Elsie also had played a gallant and successful part, for the somewhat obscure reason that it was the last bolt: so strengthening to her character had been companionship with Tinker. She was receiving, with modest pride, his congratulations on having penetrated deeper than himself, to the innermost shrine, the Trente et Quarante table, in fact, when they saw coming towards them a large, majestic, white-haired lady, a small, subdued, mouse-haired lady, and a man of doubtful appearance.

Without causing him to pause in his congratulations, Tinker's active mind had placed the two women as a wealthy Englishwoman and her companion, and was hesitating whether to place the man in the class of Continental Guides or private detectives, when he pointed to the two children, and said something to the majestic lady.

"That's the little boy, is it? Then you two go and sit on the next seat while I talk to him," said the majestic lady in a voice which lost in pleasantness what it gained in loudness; and she came to the seat on which Tinker and Elsie sat, while her attendants walked on.

Now to call him a little boy was by no means the quickest way to Tinker's heart, and he watched her draw near with a cold eye. But all the same when she made as if to sit down, he rose and raised his hat with a charming smile. She sat down and looked him over with a cool consideration which provoked his fastidiousness to no admiration of her breeding. Then she said:

"Are you Sir Tancred Beauleigh's little boy?"

"I am Hildebrand Anne Beauleigh," said Tinker in a faintly corrective tone quite lost on her complacent mind.

"Hildebrand Anne! Hildebrand Anne! She called you Hildebrand Anne, did she? The impudence of these minxes!" said the majestic lady, and she sniffed like a lady of the lower-middle classes.

At once Tinker knew that she was Lady Beauleigh, and that she was speaking of his mother. But his face never changed; only the pupils of his eyes contracted a little; and he drew a quiet, deep breath of satisfaction. He had always hoped for an interview with her, his father's step-mother, and he knew that he had the advantage; for he was armed with a very fair knowledge of her, imparted to him by his father, who thought it well to put him on his guard; and of him she knew nothing.

"Who's this little girl?" said Lady Beauleigh, surveying Elsie with her insolent stare. "Send her away. I want to talk to you alone."

"This is my adopted sister, Elsie. You may talk before her; it doesn't matter how confidential it is. I always tell her everything," said Tinker in a tone of kindly but exasperating patronage.

"I don't care! Go away, little girl!" said Lady Beauleigh, and Tinker was pleased to see the colour rise in her cheeks.

He stayed Elsie, who was rising to go, with a wave of his hand and said gently, "Is it important talk?"

"Yes; it is!" snapped Lady Beauleigh.

"Then I'd rather she stopped. My father says you should always have a witness to important talk," said Tinker, and he smiled at her.

"Stuff and nonsense! I'm your grandmother!" cried Lady Beauleigh angrily.

"Ah, then your name is Vane," said Tinker sweetly.

"Vane! Vane!" Lady Beauleigh gasped rather than spoke the hated name. "It's nothing of the kind! It's Beauleigh! I'm Lady Beauleigh!"

"I'm afraid there must be some mistake. You can't be my grandmother on my father's side. My father's mother is dead," said Tinker in a tone which almost seemed to apologise for her error.

"You must be very stupid, or very ignorant!" cried Lady Beauleigh. "I'm your grandfather's second wife, as you ought to know!"

"Oh, I know, now," said Tinker; and his face shone with his sudden enlightenment. "You keep a bank."

"I—keep—a—bank?" said Lady Beauleigh in a dreadful voice.

"Oh, not a roulette bank or baccarat bank," said Tinker with well-affected hastiness. "One of the shop kind—where they sell money—with glass doors."

"My father was a banker, if that's what you mean," said Lady Beauleigh. "But a bank isn't a shop."

"Oh, I always think it a kind of shop," said Tinker with the dispassionate air of a professor discussing a problem in the Higher Mathematics. "It's as well to lump all these—these commercial things together, isn't it?" And he was very pleased with the word commercial.

"No: it isn't! A bank isn't a shop, you stupid little boy!" cried Lady Beauleigh hotly.

"Well, just as you like," said Tinker with graceful surrender. "I only call it a shop because it's convenient."

"A boy of your age ought not to think about convenience. You ought to have been taught to keep things clear and distinct," said Lady Beauleigh in a heavy, didactic voice.

"Oh, it's quite clear to me, really, that a bank's a shop; but we won't talk about it, if you're ashamed of it. After all, one doesn't talk about trade, does one?" said Tinker with a return to his kindly but exasperating patronage.

"Ashamed of it? I'm not ashamed of it!" said Lady Beauleigh in the roar of a wounded lioness.

"No, no; of course not! I only thought you were! I made a mistake!" said Tinker quickly, with an infuriating show of humouring her.

"I'm proud of it! Proud of it!" said Lady Beauleigh thickly. "And when you grow up and understand things, you'll wish your father had been a banker, too!"

"I don't think so," said Tinker; and he smiled at her very pleasantly. "I'm quite

satisfied with my father as he is. I'd really rather that he was a gentleman."

"A banker is a gentleman!" cried Lady Beauleigh.

"Yes, yes, of course," said Tinker, humouring her again. "He's—he's a commercial gentleman."

Lady Beauleigh could find no words. Never in the course of her domineering life had she been raised to such an exaltation of whole-souled exasperation. She could only glare at the suave disposer of her long-cherished, long-asserted pretensions; and she glared with a fury which made Elsie, who had edged little by little to the extreme edge of the seat, rise softly and take up a safer position, standing three yards away.

Tinker took advantage of Lady Beauleigh's helpless speechlessness to say thoughtfully, "But about your being my grandmother? If you're not my father's mother or my mother's mother, you can't really be my grandmother. You must be my step-grandmother.

"I should think," Tinker went on, and his thoughtfulness became a thoughtful earnestness, "that you must be what people call a connection by marriage; not quite one of the family."

The thoughtfulness cleared from Tinker's brow, and he said with a pleasant smile, "But that's got nothing to do with what you came to talk about. You said it was important. What did you want to say?"

Lady Beauleigh remembered suddenly that she had come on an errand connected with her promotion of the glory of the Beauleighs. She swallowed down her fury, wiped her face with her handkerchief, and said in a hoarse and somewhat shaky voice, "I came to make you an offer."

Tinker beamed on her.

"You must be tired of this beggarly life, going about from pillar to post, living in wretched Continental hotels, with no pocket money."

Tinker raised his eyebrows.

"I know what your father's life is, just a mere penniless adventurer's."

Tinker beamed no more.

"And I came to offer to take you to live with me at Beauleigh Court. It's a beautiful big house in the country with woods all around it, and hunting and fishing and shooting and tennis-courts and fruit-gardens, and a cricket-ground, everything that a boy could want."

"And you," said Tinker in the expressionless tone of one adding an item to a catalogue.

"Yes; and me to look after you. You should have a bicycle." And she paused to let the splendour of the gift sink in.

And she paused to let the splendour of the gift sink in.

[Illustration: And she paused to let the splendour of the gift sink in.]

"I have a bicycle," said Tinker.

"Well—two bicycles—and a pony——"

"I don't like ponies—they're too slow," said Tinker in a weary voice. "I always ride a horse."

"Well, you should have a horse—a horse of your own."

"What's the hunting like? But, there, I know; it can't be up to much; it never is in those southern counties. I always hunt in Leicestershire. I've got used to it."

"You hunt in Leicestershire?" said Lady Beauleigh with some surprise.

"Oh course. Where does one hunt?" said Tinker, echoing her surprise.

"But—but—where does your horse come from? I know your father can't afford to keep horses!"

"Sometimes he can," said Tinker. "And if he has had to sell them, a dozen people will always mount us."

Lady Beauleigh paused; and then she made the last, lavish bid. "And I would allow you a hundred a year pocket-money. Why—why, you would be a little Prince!"

"A little Prince! And learn geography! No, thank you!" said Tinker, startled out of his calm. "Besides," he added carelessly, "I've made five thousand in the last year."

"Five thousand what?"

"Pounds."

"Come, come," said Lady Beauleigh, shaking her head, "you mustn't tell me

lies."

"It isn't a lie! Tinker never tells lies," broke in Elsie hotly.

"Hold your tongue, you impertinent little minx!" said Lady Beauleigh sharply. "Who asked you to speak?"

"I think you're a horrid——" said Elsie, and was checked by Tinker's upraised hand.

"And when I died," Lady Beauleigh went on, turning again to Tinker, "I should leave you thirty thousand a year—think of it—thirty thousand a year!"

"It all sounds very nice," said Tinker in a painfully indifferent tone. "But I'm afraid it wouldn't do."

"Wouldn't do? Why wouldn't it do? To live in a beautiful big house in the country, and have everything a boy could want! Why wouldn't it do?" cried Lady Beauleigh, excited by opposition to a feverish desire to compass the end on which her heart had been set for many months.

"Do you really want to know," said Tinker very gently, but with a dangerous gleam in his eyes.

"Yes; I insist on knowing!" cried Lady Beauleigh.

"Well," said Tinker slowly, pronouncing every word with a very deliberate distinctness, "we shouldn't get on, you and I. I don't know how it is; but I never get on with people who keep shops or banks. I'm afraid you're not quite—well-bred."

Stout Lady Beauleigh sprang to her feet.

"Ah, well," said Tinker quietly, "you treated my father and mother very cruelly, you've just said rude things about both of them, and you've been rude to Elsie. The fact is, I don't see that I want a step-grandmother at all; and I can't be expected to want an ill-bred one anyway. So—so—I disown you."

Lady Beauleigh's face quivered with rage; she gathered herself together as if to box Tinker's ears; thought better of it, and hurried away.

Tinker and Elsie looked at one another, and laughed softly.

"Horrid old woman," said Elsie.

"A dreadful person," said Tinker.

As Lady Beauleigh strode out of the gardens, she came full upon Sir Tancred and Dorothy. He raised his hat, she tried to glare through him, and glared at him.

"That's my step-mother," said Sir Tancred. "I wonder what's the matter with her. She looks upset."

"Upset! Why, she looked furious—malignant!" said Dorothy.

Then they saw Tinker and Elsie coming towards them.

"I see," said Sir Tancred softly.

"Oh, if she's met my young charges!" said Dorothy, and she threw out her hands.

"Have you been doing anything to your grandmother, Tinker?" cried Sir Tancred.

"Well—I disowned her," said Tinker.

"Disowned her!"

"Yes; I had to," said Tinker with a faint regret. "She was rude, and she was wearing a gown which would have stood up by itself if she had got out of it—at Monte Carlo—in April—it's impossible!"

He shrugged his shoulders.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

TINKER AND THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE

Dorothy sat gazing over that charming gulf, charming alike for its scenery and its oysters, the Gulf of Arcachon. She gazed on it without seeing it; her beautiful face was clouded, and her brow was puckered in a wondering perplexity.

Tinker sat on the ground near her, his chin on his knees, observing her with a sympathetic understanding which would have disquieted her not a little, had she not been too busy with her thoughts to notice it.

They were still and silent for a long while, until she sighed; then he said, with unfeigned sadness, "I'm beginning to think he never will."

"Who never will what?" said Dorothy, awaking from her reflections, and extremely disconcerted by the exactness with which Tinker's remark echoed them.

"My father—ask you to marry him," said Tinker succinctly.

"Tinker!" cried Dorothy faintly, and she flushed a very fine red.

"It's all very well to say 'Tinker!' like that," he said, shaking his head very wisely. "But it's much better to look at things straight, don't you know? You often get a little forrarder that way."

"You are a dreadful little boy," said Dorothy with conviction.

"Yes, yes; I'm not blind," said Tinker patiently. "But the point is, that my father is ever so much in love with you, and he'll never ask you to marry him, because you're too rich. I'm sure I've given you every chance," he added with a sigh.

"You have?" said Dorothy, gasping.

"Yes; I'm always seeing that no one makes a third when you and he are together—on moonlit nights and picnics, and so on, don't you know?"

Dorothy laughed, in spite of her discomfort, at this frank discussion of her secret. "But this is inveterate match-making," she said. "Why do you do it?"

"Oh, I think it would be a good thing. You both want it badly, and you'd get on awfully well together. Besides, you're neither of you as cheerful as you used to be, and I don't like it; it bothers me."

"It's very good of you to let it," said Dorothy, smiling.

"Not at all. And Elsie and I would have a settled home, too. It's very funny; but sometimes I get tired of living in hotels."

"I'm sure you do," said Dorothy with sympathy.

"Well, have you got any idea how it can be worked?"

"No!" cried Dorothy, shocked, and flushing again; "I haven't! I wouldn't have!"

"That's silly, when it would be such a good thing," said Tinker with a disapproving air. "However, I suppose I can work it myself. I generally have to when I want anything done."

"What are you going to do?" cried Dorothy in great alarm. "Oh, I do wish I hadn't said anything, or listened to you!"

"I don't know what I'm going to do. These affairs of the heart are always difficult," said Tinker with the air of a sage who has observed many generations of unfortunate lovers.

"I won't have you do anything; I forbid it!" cried Dorothy.

"You shouldn't order your employer about," said Tinker with a smile which, on any face less angelic, would have been a grin. "Besides, I'm responsible, and I must do what's good for you. And, after all, I shan't give you away, don't you know?"

"Oh, do be careful!" said Dorothy plaintively.

"I will," said Tinker; and he rose and sauntered off along the promenade.

Dorothy looked after him with mingled feelings, dread of what he might do, vexation, and a little shame that he should have so easily surprised her secret;

though, indeed, she preferred that Tinker should have discovered it rather than anyone else in the world. Then her sure knowledge of his discretion eased her anxiety, and the consideration of his able imagination and versatile ingenuity set a new and strong hope springing up in her.

Tinker strolled along to the Café du Printemps, and found his father sitting before it on the usual uncomfortable little chair before the usual white-topped table. He saw that his father's face wore the same expression as Dorothy's had worn before he had insisted on coming to her aid. Then he saw, with something of a shock, that a glass of absinthe stood on the table. Things must, indeed, be in a bad way if his father drank absinthe at half-past ten in the morning.

However, he hid his disapproval, and sitting down on another uncomfortable chair, he said gently, "What does it mean when a lady is compromised, sir?"

"It means that some accident or other has given malignant fools a chance of gossiping about her," said Sir Tancred in an unamiable tone.

"And the man has to marry her?"

"Of course he has," snapped Sir Tancred.

"Ah!" said Tinker with supreme thoughtful satisfaction.

His father looked at him for a good minute with considerable suspicion, wondering what new mischief he was hatching. But Tinker looked like a guileless seraph pondering the innocent joys of the Islands of the Blessed, to a degree which made such a suspicion a very shameful thing indeed. Partly reassured, Sir Tancred returned to his brooding: he was angry with himself because he felt helpless in an *impasse*. On the one hand, he could not bring himself to fly from Dorothy; on the other, he could not bring himself to abate his pride, and ask her to marry him. She was so rich; Septimus Rainer had talked of settling five million dollars on her. He looked again at the pondering Tinker; and his helpless irritation found the natural English vent in grumbling.

"Look here," he said, half querulously, half whimsically, "I told you that if you went on adding to our household, I should be travelling about Europe with a caravan. You began by adopting Elsie as a sister, and I said nothing. Then you added Miss Rainer as her governess, and I warned you. Miss Rainer added her father, a millionaire, and he added a maid, a valet, two secretaries, a courier, and

a private detective. All these people, I know them well, will marry; and I shall be a patriarch travelling with my tribe. It must stop."

Tinker sighed. "We are a large household—twelve of us, with Selina," he said thoughtfully. "But you might make it more compact, sir."

"More compact—how?"

"You might marry Dorothy; and then you and she could count as one."

A sudden light of exasperation brightened Sir Tancred's eyes, and he made a grab at Tinker's arm. His hand closed on empty air; Tinker was flying like the wind along the promenade.

"Tinker!" roared Sir Tancred; but Tinker went round a corner at the moment at which only the T of his name could fairly be expected to have reached him. Sir Tancred ground his teeth, and then he laughed.

Tinker made a circuit, and came down to the sea, where he found Elsie playing with two little English girls staying at Arcachon with their mother. At once she deserted them for him, and when he had withdrawn her to a distance, he said, "I've hit on a way of getting them married."

"No! Have you? You are clever!" she cried with the ungrudging admiration she always accorded him.

"Clever? It only wants a little common-sense," said Tinker with some disdain.

"I shall be glad."

"So shall I. It'll be a weight off my mind, don't you know?" said Tinker with a sigh.

"I'm sure it will," said the sympathetic Elsie.

"It must be awfully nice to be in love," she added with conviction.

"Now, look here," said Tinker in a terrible voice, "if I catch you falling in love, I'll—I'll shake you!"

"But—but, I may be in love—ever so much, for anything you know," said Elsie somewhat haughtily.

"You are not," said Tinker sternly. "Your appetite is all right. Don't talk any more nonsense, but come along, we've got to get ready for the picnic."

At half-past eleven the two children went on board the *Petrel*, a little steam yacht of a shallow draught adapted to the shoals of the Gulf, which Septimus Rainer had hired from a member of the Bordeaux Yacht Club. They found Dorothy and Sir Tancred already on board, and were told that a cablegram from New York had given her father, his secretaries, and the telegraph office of Arcachon a day's work, and prevented him from coming with them. Tinker had known this fact all the morning, but he did not say so. His manner to his father showed a serene unconsciousness of any cloud upon their relations.

The *Petrel* was soon crossing the Gulf in an immensely important way, at her full speed of eight knots an hour. In pursuance of his policy Tinker took Elsie forward, and left Dorothy and his father to entertain one another on the quarter-deck. The two children amused themselves very well talking to Alphonse, the steersman, and Adolphe, the engineer, thick-set, thick-witted men, who combined the picturesqueness of organ-grinders with the stolidity of agriculturalists; Nature had plainly intended them for the plough, and Circumstance had pitched them into seafaring.

An hour's steering brought them across the Gulf. They landed, and made their déjeuner at a little auberge, or rather cabaret, affected by fishermen, and the folk of the *Landes*, off grey mullet, fresh from the Bay of Biscay, grilled over a fire of pine-cones, with a second course of ring-doves roasted before it.

After their coffee Tinker suggested that they should cross over to the strip of sand which at that point separates the Gulf from the Bay, and the others fell in with his humour. They crossed over and landed in the yacht's dinghy. Tinker insisted on taking two rugs, though both Dorothy and his father objected that the sand was quite dry enough to sit on. However, when they came to the beach of the Bay, Sir Tancred spread them out, and he and Dorothy sat on them. The two children wandered away, and presently Elsie found herself holding Tinker's hand, and running hard through the pines towards the landing-place.

In answer to Tinker's hail, Alphonse fetched them aboard in the dingey, and

the honest, unsuspecting mariners accepted his instructions to take them for a cruise, and come back later for his father and the lady, without a murmur. But no sooner was the *Petrel* under weigh, than he strode to the middle of the quarter-deck, folded his arms, scowled darkly in the direction of his father and Dorothy, so heedless of their plight, and growled in his hoarsest, most piratical voice:

"Marooned! Marooned!"

Slowly he paced the deck, with arms still folded, casting the piercing glances of a bird of prey across the waters; then of a sudden he roared once more with the true piratical hoarseness, "All hands on deck to splice the main brace!"

Alphonse and Adolphe did not understand his nautical English; but when Elsie came from the cabin with a bottle of cognac and two glasses, their slow, wide grins showed a perfect comprehension. Tinker gave them the cognac, and took the wheel. Then he became absorbed in steering, and sternly rejected all further consideration of his gift; he would have neither hand nor part in houcussing French agriculturalists posing as mariners.

But for all his absorption in his steering, and his care to look past them as they sat in more than fraternal affection on the deck, with the bottle between them, it was somehow forced on him, probably by the noise they made, that they proceeded from a gentle cheerfulness through a wild and songful hilarity, broken by interludes in which either described to the other with eloquent enthusiasm the charms of the lass who loved him best, to a tearful melancholy, from which they were rapt away into a sodden and stertorous slumber.

At the third snore Tinker turned to Elsie, who sat by him looking rather scared by the changing humours of the agricultural mariners, and said with a sardonic and ferocious smile, "The ship is ours."

At once they divested themselves of the hats of civilisation, and tied round their heads the red handkerchiefs proper to their profession; then he gave her the wheel, and going to the cabin, came back with a black flag neatly embroidered in white with a skull and crossbones, Dorothy's work, and sternly bade an imaginary quartermaster run up the Jolly Roger. Then, as quartermaster, he ran up that emblem of his dreadful trade himself; became captain once more, and, with folded arms and corrugated brow surveyed it gloomily. Then he went down to the engine-room, put the yacht on half-speed, and, as well as he could, stoked

the fires.

For the next three hours the *Petrel* forgot all the innocent traditions of her youth as a pleasure boat, and traversed the Gulf of Arcachon a shameless, ravening pirate, while Captain Hildebrand, the Scourge of the Spanish Main, issued curt, sanguinary orders to an imaginary but as blood-dyed a gang of villains as ever scuttled an Indiaman. The Jolly Roger and three or four blank shots from the little signal gun drove three panic-stricken fishing boats from their fishing-ground as fast as oars and sails could carry them, to spread abroad a legend of piracy in the Gulf which would last a generation.

It was nearly sunset before Captain Hildebrand returned to the serious consideration of his business as Cupid's ally. Then he set the *Petrel* going dead slow, ran her gently on to a sandbank, and let fall the anchor, which was hanging from her bows. This done, again a pirate, he looked at the recumbent and still stertorous Alphonse and Adolphe with cold, cruel eyes, and said, "It's time these lubbers walked the plank."

It's time these lubbers walked the plank.

[Illustration: It's time these lubbers walked the plank.]

"Ay, ay, sir!" said Elsie cheerfully; and then she added, in a doubtful voice, "But won't the poor men get drowned?"

"Not in four feet of water," said Captain Hildebrand; and he set briskly about the preparations for the fell deed. With Elsie's help he brought a plank to the gangway; and then, either taking him by an arm, they dragged the grunting Adolphe slowly down the deck, and arranged him on the plank. With a capstan bar, and many a hearty "Yo, heave ho!" they levered the plank out over the side till Adolphe's weight tilted it up, and he soused into the water.

For a moment he disappeared, then he rose spluttering and choking, sank again, found his footing, and stood up, roaring like a flabbergasted bull. Captain Hildebrand lay quietly down on the deck, and writhed and kicked in spasms of racking mirth; but his trusty lieutenant, after laughing a while, looked grave, and said, "The poor man will take cold."

"I have no sympathy with drunkards," said Captain Hildebrand with cold

severity; but he rose, and, going forward, by kicking Alphonse hard and freely in the ribs, roused him from his dream of the lass who loved a sailor, and said, "Adolphe has fallen overboard."

It took some time for the information to penetrate Alphonse's skull. When it did, he was all vivid alertness, staggered swiftly aft to the gangway, and in rather less than five seconds, with no conspicuous agility, had precipitated himself into Adolphe's arms. They rose, clinging to one another, and both roared like bulls, while the shrieking Tinker danced lightly round the deck.

Presently he recovered enough to throw them a rope, and they climbed on board: no difficult feat, seeing that the deck was not two feet above their heads. Before they thought of the yacht they went to the forecabin and changed their wet clothes, while the dusk deepened. Tinker went to the galley, and made tea. He had brought it to the cabin, and he and Elsie were making a well-earned and hearty meal, and discoursing with gusto of their blood-dyed career during the afternoon, when Alphonse, very sad and glum, came and told them that the yacht was aground, and Adolphe was getting up full steam to get her off. Tinker with great readiness said he would come up and help.

In half an hour he heard the rattle of the propeller, and, coming on deck, said he would go to the bows while Alphonse took the wheel, and Adolphe worked the engines.

He went right forward, and peered into the darkness. Adolphe set the engines going full speed, reversed, and Tinker cried, "She's moving!"

He saw the anchor chain slowly tauten, then the *Petrel* moved no more. The propeller thrashed away, but to no purpose, and to his great joy he was sure that the anchor held her. However, he cheered them on to persevere, and for nearly half an hour the propeller thrashed away. Then they gave it up, sat down gloomily on the hatch of the engine room, and lighted their pipes. Tinker and Elsie went back to the cabin, rolled themselves in rugs, and were soon enjoying the innocent sleep of childhood.

It was twelve o'clock when Tinker awoke, and at once he went on deck and found that Alphonse, by way of keeping watch, had gone comfortably asleep in the bows, while Adolphe snored from the forecabin. He kicked Alphonse awake, and said, "Don't you think you could get her off if you hauled up the anchor?"

For a minute or two Alphonse turned the idea hazily over in his apology for a mind; then, with a hasty exclamation, he ran to the side, and saw dimly the taut anchor chain. He blundered below, lugged Adolphe out of his berth and on deck, and for five excited minutes they explained to one another that the anchor was embedded in the sandbank, and that it held the *Petrel* on it. Then soberly and slowly they got to work on the capstan, and hauled up the anchor. A dozen turns of the propeller drew the *Petrel* off the bank and into deep water. In three minutes they had her about and steamed off towards the marooned, while Tinker in the galley was heating water for coffee and making soup.

In the meanwhile Dorothy and Sir Tancred, ignorant of their plight, had spent a delightful afternoon exploring with a never-tiring interest one another's souls. For a long time she chided him gently for his aimless manner of living; and he defended himself with a half-mocking sadness. At about sunset they rose reluctantly, sighed with one accord that the pleasant hours were over, looked at one another with sudden questioning eyes at the sound of the sighs, and looked quickly away. They walked slowly, on feet reluctant to leave pleasant places, through the pines, silent, save that twice Sir Tancred sent his voice ringing among the trees in a call to Tinker. They came to the landing-place, to find an empty sea, and looked at one another blankly.

"The children must have persuaded the men to take them for a cruise," said Sir Tancred.

"But they're late coming back," said Dorothy.

For a while their eyes explored the corners and recesses of the Gulf within sight, but found no *Petrel*. Then Sir Tancred said, "Well, we must wait"; and spread a rug for her at the foot of a tree. He paced up and down before her, keeping an eye over the water and talking to her.

The dusk deepened and deepened, and at last it was quite dark.

"We're in a fix," said Sir Tancred uneasily. "Of course, if we stay here they will come for us sooner or later, but goodness knows when. If we set out to walk to civilisation we shall doubtless in time strike it somewhere, but goodness knows where."

"If we went along this strip and turned eastward at the end of it shouldn't we come to the railway?" said Dorothy.

"I don't know that we should. We should get into the *Landes*, and they're by way of being trackless. Anyhow it would mean walking for hours; and it is less exhausting for you to sit here. The *Petrel* must turn up sooner or later."

Remembering her talk with Tinker in the morning, Dorothy believed that it would be later—much later; but as she could hardly unfold her reasons for the belief, she said nothing.

For a long time they were silent. Listening to the faint thunder of the Bay behind them, the lapping of the water at their feet, and the stirring of the pines, she filled slowly with a sense of their aloofness from the world, and a perfect content in being out of it alone with him. For his part, Sir Tancred was ill at ease; he foresaw that unless the *Petrel* came soon a lot of annoying gossip might spring from their accident, and he was distressed on her account. On the other hand, he, too, found himself enjoying being alone with her out of the world.

At last she said softly, "I feel as though we were on a desolate, far-away island."

"I wish to goodness we were!" he cried, with a fervour which thrilled her.

"You'd find it very dull," she said, with a faint, uncertain laugh.

"Not with you," he said quietly.

She was silent; and he took another turn up and down before he said, half to himself, "It would simplify things so, we should be equal."

"Equal?"

"Oh, not from the personal point of view!" he said quickly. "You'd always be worth a hundred of me. But on a desolate island money wouldn't count."

"Oh, money!" she said with a faint disdain. "What has money to do with anything?"

He sighed, and continued his pacing.

"Money is always an obstacle," he said presently. "Either there is too little of it, and that's an obstacle; or there is too much of it, and that's an obstacle."

"I don't think papa would agree with you about too much money," said Dorothy.

"I'm wondering what he will say if we don't turn up before morning," said Sir Tancred gloomily.

"I suppose he'll say that it was an unfortunate accident."

"Yes; but then, I ought to have protected you against unfortunate accidents. I'm afraid there'll be a lot of gossip."

"Well, it wasn't your fault," said Dorothy carelessly.

Sir Tancred grew more and more unhappy. His watch told him that it was nearly ten o'clock, and there was no sign of the *Petrel*. Moreover, the sense of their aloofness from the world had taken a firmer hold on him, and it drew him and Dorothy nearer and nearer together. The feeling that the world, of which her money had grown the symbol, would again come between them, grew more and more intolerable.

At last it grew too strong for him, and he stopped before her and said, in a voice he could not keep firm, "About that wasted life of mine, Dorothy. Do you think you could do anything with it?"

Dorothy gasped. "I might—I might try," she said in a whisper.

He stooped down, picked her up, and kissed her. Then, with a profound sigh of relief and content, he sat down beside her, drew her to him, and leaned back against the tree; she was crying softly.

They were far away from the world, and for them time stood still. They did not see the approaching lights of the *Petrel*, or hear the throb of her screw; only the roaring hail of Alphonse awoke them from their dream.

When they came on board, the observant Tinker saw the flush which came and went in Dorothy's cheeks, and the new light in his father's eyes; he saw her genuine surprise at finding herself so hungry. He observed that his father was quite careless about the cause of the *Petrel's* long absence, and his angel face was wreathed with the contented smile of the truly meritorious.

After supper his father went on deck to watch the steering of the yacht; Elsie fell asleep; and Dorothy sat, lost in a dream.

"Is it all right?" said Tinker softly.

"I don't know what you mean. You're a horrid scheming little boy," said Dorothy with shameless ingratitude.

"Yes; but *is* it all right?" said Tinker.

"I shan't let you scheme like that when—when I'm your mother," said Dorothy with virtuous severity, and she blushed.

"So it *is* all right," said Tinker, and he chuckled.

THE END

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