

slowly, 'for the third—and—last—time, Mike, *are you coming?—tres!*'

"But never an answer did he get from me. And so, exasperated over my unyielding silence, he called out quickly:

" 'Well, then, here she goes, Mike!' and the last word had scarcely escaped utterance when, lo! there was a terrible report, and a flash like lightning; then a bullet hissed by me, just an inch or so above the spot where I lay in bed dozing.

"Quickly, I started as from some horrible nightmare, and was on my feet in a second—scared to death, and shaking like a jelly-fish! In fact, it was only long after I had recovered from the shock, that I began to realize just what had happened, and the narrow escape that I had had. Frankinton, too; for he called out to me somewhat nervously:

" 'For God's sake, Mike, are you hurt at all, old chap?—talk out, will you? for the thing has given me the ague!'

"Then, I thought I heard him shiver—'br—r—r—!' but I gave him no answer, thinking that the addition of a little suspense to

his anxiety, would serve him well as a lesson for the future. When I felt that I had kept him waiting long enough for an answer, I relented, and broke the silence.

“ ‘I’m all right, Franky,’ I said, ‘and alive and kicking; but that isn’t all of it—no! not by a jug full! I’ve had a narrow escape, I can tell you, and I want to say this much, Frankinton, I’m pretty mad with you for what you’ve just done! I cannot, for the *life of me*, understand what got it into your head to commit so rash an act. Anyhow, we’ll drop the matter for the present, for I’m tired, and am going to bed at once; but to-morrow you’ll hear further from me on the subject.’

“This, no doubt, was taken by Frankinton in the spirit of a threat; and I fancy, too, that he must have pictured himself, valise in hand, boarding the next outgoing steamer for New York—at least, I judged so by the tremor in his voice when he answered:

“ ‘Mike, old chap, now look here; there’s no use in your getting riled at all! I really didn’t mean to do it—so help me God, I

didn't, Mike! And I'll take my solemn oath to it, that I never even knew the gun was loaded, till the darn thing went off on me suddenly! Will you believe me, Mike, and give me your word that you'll say nothing of this affair to the Old Man to-morrow?"

"Feeling convinced that he was really in earnest, and perfectly innocent of any attempt on my life, I made him the promise, and both of us turned in to our respective beds—Frankinton, haply, resolving to fool no more with firearms, and I, well—wondering over the miraculous escape that I had had."

It was just 1 o'clock of New Year's morning when Mike had finished his story, at the close of which the Reading-room re-echoed with a wild burst of laughter and applause, that must have awakened the entire neighborhood! Then there began the stamping of feet, which was simply uproarious; but when the din had reached to a deafening point, Frankinton, always the man of emergency, rose to the present occasion, held his hands aloft, and, waving them to and fro

glance his sparsely-curled head, demanded silence at the top of his very small voice.

"Thorn? — Thorn? — Thorn?" he said, when's enough of your smoke, now, boys? Quit your noises, I say, for it's late, and the whole neighbourhood will be requesting us to hush up to the *Old Hag*; and then some of us may get it *to the proof*. Do you all know when that it is now?" he asked, looking down generally on his scotch, which he held in his hand, as he said in answer to his own question.

"Well, it's about time to get a move on us! I am feeling pretty down day, I can tell you, and I guess you must all be about in the same condition as I am; so come along now," he commanded imperiously, as he turned round and motioned the crowd to the doorway, he taking the lead outside, while the rest of the boys followed him, until they were all in Hobbler's room, where it had been arranged to carry out the plan of extracting the heads of Society's study.

III.

Hudsin's room was situated at the north-east end of the building, which fronted the palm-rimmed seashore. It was, of course, the best furnished apartment in the premises because, well—it was the Commissary's.

In this room, that early New Year's morning, sat Fred Hudsin, Jimmy Ward, George Dranrab, Slim Frankinton, Will Wincherster, John Guthrie, Mike Devlante, A. Sharp, Alex Walker and Tom Thatcher, all of them speaking in subdued voices.

After a short while, there was suppressed laughter among the crowd; and every eye was turned on Frankinton when he got up from his chair and walked across the floor to the little marble-top wash-stand, that stood in one corner of the bedroom. When he reached the wash-stand, he rolled up his

shirt-sleeves, as far back as they could go, and busied himself as he said humorously:

“Gentlemen of the Jury, we’ll now proceed with the affairs of this Convention;” saying which he picked up a piece of sweet-soap, placed it into a basin, threw some water over it, and began stirring the soap around until it had dissolved itself into thick white suds, that foamed and bubbled. During this strange performance, the boys gazed curiously at Frankinton, and a far-away look illumined every man’s eye—a look, well, in which, it seemed, there reflected the memory of long-dead days, associated with white clay pipes, that spouted rainbow-colored bubbles, which went up to heaven and burst in the clear-blue skies of happy childhood!

But a sudden rap at the door, which broke the spell of this delightful reverie, sent the boys into dire confusion, while Frankinton quickly picked up the basin, which contained the soap-suds that he had just been churning, and, lying flat upon his stomach on the floor, hid it under the bed

as far back as his slender hand could reach; then everybody began to put on a borrowed-look of angelic goodness.

When everything was quiet, Hudsin rose and opened the door; when, to his great surprise, dear old Billy Thomson and Willie Mackenzie stood before him—the one holding up the frame of the doorway and smiling good-naturedly upon the crowd inside; the other sour of countenance and ready to explode with vituperation!

Billy Thomson was the first to break the silence:

“Young gentlemen—young gentlemen,” he said, with much deliberation, “don’t you think you’ve all had enough of this thing already?”

“Enough?” interrupted Mackenzie, gruffly; “darn it, I should say they have had! Why, hang it! my wife and I haven’t had a blessed wink of sleep during the livelong night, on account of the disgraceful racket downstairs. Have you chaps thought for a moment what the *Old Man* would say if this scandalous affair was ever brought to

his notice? There'd be trouble, I can tell you! I guess," he continued more moderately, "you've all forgotten the night that he threatened, in the presence of you all in the Reading-room down-stairs, to shut up the *Washington House* if you fellows didn't behave different to what you were doing then——"

"Mack!" interrupted Hudsin, "for heaven's sake, quit your lecturing now, and come in just for a minute, won't you?—you, too, Mr. Thomson; for there's something doing: Frankinton has a small bet on hand which he wants to settle immediately. If he loses, he's to blow us off at the *Howard House* this evening; and just fancy, Old Pike is to make the cocktails for us. Poor fellow! What a time he'll have shaking 'em up with that queer-shaped hand of his! Anyhow, you must come in and see the fun; we're going to work a little game on." Here Hudsin broke off abruptly, and stood up between Thomson and Mackenzie, with a hand laid upon each one's shoulder as he whispered to both of

them something that brought a smile upon their faces and induced them to join the happy gathering.

As soon as all hands were settled in their seats, Frankinton resumed his soap-suds operations, while Hudsin began undressing himself and getting into his silk pajamas. His pajamas on, Hudsin jumped into bed with such a fierce bound that the spring mattress vibrated beneath him for some seconds afterwards; a performance which, of course, created no little amusement among the party, and sent the boys into a fit of laughter.

“Hi! there!” shouted Frankinton; “that’s enough of your stupid giggling, now! If you don’t stop this foolish laughing, we’ll be up a gum-tree just as sure as you live!” With this admonition he clenched his right hand tightly and held it high up in the air, with which command he finally brought the boys to order.

Silence reigning in the room, Frankinton immediately proceeded to pose Hudsin in the bed for the occasion of the onslaught

on Scotty's brandy. The adjustment over, it was the most comical sight that one could ever imagine. There was Hudsin, lying stretched out at full length upon the bed, under a snow-white counterpane, with a stern, rigid, look upon his countenance that betrayed the determination, come what might, to intercept the smile that dared to threaten the long-contemplated scheme with ruin!

At the side of the bed stood George Dranrab, judge-serious, holding the basin of soap-suds, awaiting the time for action. At this particular juncture, the meeting rose to its highest pitch of excitement, and speculations began to run wild as to the ultimate outcome of a crazy undertaking! Frankinton, however, stood to his gun like a man, and Hudsin, too, to the disagreeable and unsavory part which he was playing in the entire affair.

When everything was ready, Frankinton gave his last instructions to Hudsin, then turned to Dranrab and said:

“Remember now, *Dear George,*” which

was the name that Dranrab always went by, "you know exactly what to do! For God's sake, don't make a mess of the thing! If you do, well, my name will be Dennis, whatever that may mean! Listen carefully now, and take it all in: when you hear us coming, fill up Hudsin's mouth with the suds, and leave the balance to the patient."

Saying which, he took his way out quietly, and went in the direction of Scotty's room that was situated on the other side of the building. Scotty was fast asleep at the time; but as the first rap sounded on his door, he jumped up, and, in his usual rough style demanded at the top of his voice:

"Who the devil is there? and what in h—— do you want of me at this early hour of the morning?"

"Hush—hush—hush, Scotty; for the Lord's sake, hush; don't make such a fearful noise, old chap—the shock might kill him!—it's I, Frankinton."

"Well, what is the matter now?" thundered Scotty. "I really don't understand

you!—"The shock might kill him?" Why don't you talk out plainly?—kill whom?—By God, I begin to think you've got 'em bad this time, Frankinton! Go on with you, and get to bed now!—A nice shine that you've all kicked up downstairs—isn't it? Glad I wasn't in the crowd!"

"That's all right, Scotty; it doesn't cut any figure at all whether you were there or not; I came here only to—to—to—tell—you—" said Frankinton, smothering a great lump of laughter with the tail-end of his pajama jacket—

"Darn it!" interrupted Scotty, "why don't you spit it out quickly?—to tell me *what?*"

"To tell you, Scotty, that Hudsin has just been taken in pretty sick, and to ask if you wouldn't come over and see if you can do anything for him. The poor fellow is threatened with a fit, it seems; for his eyes are wild, and his face is as red as it can be!"

"You don't say!" exclaimed Scotty, excitedly opening the door and admitting Frankinton.

"That's just what I do, Scotty; so hurry

up and come; for there isn't a moment to lose!"

After a very trifling delay, hunting for his slippers, which he finally found under the furthestmost part of the bed, where we're sure to find our slippers always, Scotty rushed out of his room, Frankinton following him closely.

IV.

The first thing that attracted Scotty's attention as he entered Hudsin's room, was the figure that lay stretched out on the bed supinely. For a moment, Scotty stood up silent and aghast; then, with a look of earnest solicitude, that multiplied the wrinkles on his lineaments, he bent down enquiringly over Hudsin, when his eyes met the wild and glassy stare of the patient's.

Observing, at once, that Hudsin was foaming at his mouth, copiously, Scotty became alarmed, and turned around and exclaimed:

"Gracious goodness, boys! the fellow is in a fit—sure! Look at him!—his eyes are almost bursting from their sockets; and see!—he's got another attack again!—Run for the doctor!—somebody!—anybody!" he yelled excitedly; and then he began to navigate the full length and breadth of the bed-

room—confused and lost as to what to do for the patient in the meantime! Regaining his equilibrium, he resumed calmly:

“For God’s sake, Frankinton, have you nothing at all in the house to give the poor chap to drink? If you have, why—d— it! trot it out quickly, and don’t leave the man suffering here like this for the want of something to revive him!”

This little speech from Scotty had wound the crowd up almost to a bursting tension; but Slim Frankinton, good general as he was always, stepped forward and answered promptly:

“Scotty, old chap, I’m sorry to tell you there isn’t a drop of anything around here; but say,” he added naively, “perhaps *you* have, and wouldn’t mind coming to the rescue like a good fellow.”

Here, Frankinton had driven the wedge right home—scoring one on Scotty; for the appeal had come just when a man’s existence, as Scotty believed at the time, hung in the balance of his decision, on which all

hands waited with keen and breathless anxiety!

But, in the crucial moment, the better part of Scotty soon prevailed, as it will always with men of his stamp and calibre! For he immediately raised his head, that had been bent down in deep deliberation, mopped the glistening beads of perspiration off his forehead, then, after gazing thoughtfully around, dashed out of the room *a la* spread-eagle, and dashed back again—out of breath, and bearing under his left arm a bottle of brandy, from which the cork had not yet been extracted.

Thrusting the bottle into Frankinton's hand, he exclaimed, somewhat excitedly:

“Here you are, Franky, old boy; open it quickly and give him a good, stiff slug while I run and call the doctor!”

And off he went like a shot, for Hitchcock, who lived in one of the small bungalows that stood then where the more imposing residence of the General Superintendent is now standing.

When the last sound of his footsteps had

died into the distance, there was a great laugh on Scotty, during which Hudsin got up, closed the door securely, rinsed his mouth out, and afterwards began to rehabilitate himself.

Flushed with triumph, Frankinton turned to Hudsin, who had won his laurels, too, in the heroic part he had played in the whole affair, and commanded him to open the bottle and pass the contents 'round to everybody. Then, when all the glasses were charged, Hudsin lifted his, and, with an air of self-satisfaction lighting up his countenance, his lips curled into a pleasant smile, said :

“Well, boys, I guess it's about time now we did have something to brace us up a bit! —here's to Scotty!”

Then every man tossed his *trago* down, while “Scotty!” — “Scotty!” — “Scotty!” rent the quiet of the New Year morning and died away into an echo.

V.

Scotty was not aware of the fact, however, that Frankinton had called on Hitchcock the day before, and, confiding to him the secret of his contemplated intrigue, had solicited his medical co-operation—whereupon the good-natured doctor had dismissed him, saying:

“It’s all right, Franky; go ahead and count on me whenever you’re ready; and you can just bet your sweet life that I’ll be there on time to put the finishing touches to the job. Darn my soul if I don’t think it’ll be a pretty good lesson for Scotty in the future!”

Ignorant of all this, Scotty went his way that early New Year morning in search of the doctor, whom he did not find at his bungalow, however. He had been called out, as the negro inside informed him, to attend to Mrs. Smith, the dear old soul of

Howard House notoriety, who had been taken suddenly ill with a severe attack of inflammatory *rheumatism*. Scotty was, therefore, compelled to walk all the way down town to hunt up Hitchcock, upon whose head, every step and turn he made, he poured forth his wrath through an almost exhaustless vocabulary of "cuss-words," from which the pen would blush to quote in these pages!

This, Mike learnt, sometime afterwards, from black old Sophie Taylor, Purveyor, in those days, to the P. M. S. S. steamers, whom he met one morning carrying under her arm a large basket of provisions which she said "Missa Badgly de 'teward, "had 'axed her fe fetch fe him."

Laying her burden down upon the sidewalk, in front of Butler's Barber-Shop, where one heard the gossip of the day from the tonsorial artist, she told the story in her own peculiar vernacular:

"Lawd, me Gawd, sir!" she exclaimed, putting up her hand to her mouth with an air of extreme indignation, "tell me, me

good Massa, de what been matter wid Missa Scotty de oder morning—eh? Well, sir, I always know dat de gentleman could 'a' cuss fe true; but, me mudder me dead! I neber hear him swear as him did de oder morning I meet him up coming' down Front 'treet, bruck-neck fashion, looking for de doctar! Me backra pickney! dat was what you call cuss-cuss wid a vengeance! I neber hear anyt'ing like it in all me born-days life—no, sir! Cho! me face would fall flat to de groun' if I eber was to 'tan' up so tell you all de bad wuds him cuss dat morning!—believe me, Missa Devlante, I really t'ink de sound o' dem would 'top up you' two ears-hole worse dan when wax get into dem!"

But Mike needed no telling; he, and, for the matter of that, the rest of the boys knew full well that when it came to "cussing"—real, hard, straight-forward, unvarnished ungilded "cussing"—Scotty took the palm and—kept it always.

After this unavoidable digression, we'll take the reader back to Hudsins' room,

where the revel had subsided into that calm which generally follows a storm.

Here we find Frankinton looking serious, and asking in a nervous sort of voice :

“But, say, boys, what, in the name of heavens, are we going to say to Scotty about this thing when he returns?—he’ll surely want to know what has become of the balance of his brandy; and, *certainly*, we’ll have to tell him something—anything, until he finds out for himself the real truth of the story. So, come now, get your heads together and try your best to work out some good, plausible yarn before he pounces in upon us, which he is liable to do at any minute now——”

“The devil!” shouted Hudsin, stepping forward and looking defiant, “what in the world are you all beginning to lose your nerves about?—give *me* the empty bottle,” he demanded, taking the same from Frankinton and hiding it under one of the pillows on the bed, saying: “The doctor and I will attend to *that* part of the business when the proper time arrives,

Here, the sound of approaching footsteps on the staircase interrupted the speaker suddenly, and a general stampede ensued: With all his clothing on, Hudsins sprang into bed, drew the counterpane quickly over him as far up to his neck as it could go, turned his face towards the wall, and "made believe" that he was sleeping.

When everything and everybody had settled down quietly, Frankinton lowered the light a bit, then opened the door and admitted Scotty, who was accompanied by the doctor.

"Well!" growled Hitchcock before he had even entered the room, "what's the trouble now?—calling a man so early in the morning! Darn it! if you chaps would only quit taking that vile stuff you drink any and everywhere you go down town, you wouldn't get the *jim-jams* as often, I'll bet you!"

"How is Hudsins?" he asked abruptly.

"Sleeping quietly," responded Frankinton.

"Any more fits?"

"No!" was the laconic reply from Frankinton.

"That's good!" said Hitchcock, as he walked in and took a seat alongside of the bed on which Hudsin was lying; shortly after doing which he tested the pseudo-patient's pulse, looking down upon his watch gravely.

During this serio-comic performance, however, Hudsin remained perfectly imperturbable, and the boys held their breath for all they were worth, fearing the result of an outburst of pent-up laughter! Finally, Hitchcock broke the terrible silence of the moment——

"He's resting calmly now, and his pulse is fairly regular," he said without a single twitch of his countenance; then he resumed shortly:

"He'll be all right again as soon as he wakes up."

"But, say, Doc', what do you think gave him those awful fits?" enquired Scotty nervously.

"*What* do I think gave him those awful

fits?" repeated the doctor satirically; "well, now, look here, Scotty, if you'd only put the thing the other way 'round, old chap, prefixing your question with 'Who' instead of 'What,' I should answer, without the slightest hesitation that—you are responsible for them all!" at which mysterious response Scotty was startled, and he fell back a step or two—his face as livid as a ghost's!

"I?" was his laconic rejoinder. "I'm afraid, Doc', I do not catch on to you exactly! what the devil could *I* have to do with Hudsin's fits, will you tell me?"

"Lots!" exclaimed the doctor, shoving his hand under a pillow and withdrawing it again quickly—saying as he did so:

"And here's a proof of it!—do you recognize this?" asked Hitchcock, holding up an empty bottle to Scotty, and tapping upon it with the ringed third finger of his right hand; "this," he said, "contained the stuff that has been the sole cause of Hudsin's trouble!" But Scotty did not understand, nor yet did he try to; for the moment, he remembered only his precious brandy, against

the loss of which he protested good-humoredly.

"Recognize," he answered, "a darn looking wreck of a thing like that, without a drop of liquor left into it?—recognize hell!—no, sir, not by a d— sight!"

"Hush your racket there, will you, Scotty?" interposed Frankinton calmly. "Hang it," he continued, "ain't you got any better sense than that—making such a noise when the doctor has just given a hypodermic of morphine to Hudsins, who must be kept perfectly quiet?"

With which reproof Scotty was silenced immediately! For, strange to say, from the very beginning of the farce to the present stage of the performance, the possibility of dissemblance had never once occurred to Scotty. Rather to the contrary: everything appeared too natural, as he thought, for him to have looked upon the whole affair in the light of a huge practical joke only. There was the doctor's visit, for instance, and then the hypodermic of morphine, both of which, after revolving them

carefully over in his mind, he accepted as ample evidence that there was no deception underlying the Hudsin-case at all; and so, as a natural consequence, suspicion lay dormant within him.

What, of course puzzled Scotty immensely was Hitchcock's charge against him; and he wondered upon what ground the doctor could have made the imputation. Could there have been anything, he imagined, in the quality of the liquor—which, by the way, he had since discovered was none of the best—that had brought about such serious results to Hudsin? But then, he dismissed the thought immediately, seeing that the effect had not been general. Nevertheless, bewildered over the matter, he stood up silent for a moment, gazing upon the floor, and looking thoughtful.

By this time, however, Hudsin had reached the limit of his endurance, and could stand the strain no longer; so, taking advantage of Scotty's preoccupation, he turned, almost imperceptibly, over in the bed and nudged the doctor with his elbow.

Hitchcock took the hint at once, and made a sign to Frankinton; soon after which the lamp, that had been burning dimly on the table, went out suddenly and left all hands in total darkness!

When the lamp had again been lighted, there appeared a perfect revelation before Scotty! *There* was Hudsin, sitting up at the edge of the bed, his feet upon the floor, his elbows resting on his knees, his hands supporting his forehead. After a while, he raised his head up slowly, made grimaces at the crowd, and burst out laughing—belching forth a whole mouthful of soap-suds and besmearing everybody! Then it was that the whole thing dawned, at last, on Scotty, who, accepting the joke with a sense of good humor, joined in the laughter, that soon became general, and shortly after turned to Hitchcock and exclaimed:

“Je-rusalem!”—with an accent on the first syllable—“is that the man who had a fit a moment ago, Doc’? If it is, well, darn my soul, he did the thing to the letter! And

as for you and Frankinton, Doc', well! well! well! le' me tell you this right here now; you're the bossiest pair of liars I *ever* have come across! But it's all right, boys," he said, turning around and addressing himself to the crowd, "I own up to it, frankly, that you've caught me this time; but say—don't make any mistake about it—not as badly as you all might think you have! Where's the empty bottle? Give it to me," he demanded abruptly, taking it from Frankinton and examining the label. The scrutiny over, he laid the bottle down upon the table, stroked his hair, and exclaimed suggestively:

"For heaven's sake!—do you chaps know what you've all been drinking?—Guess!" In answer to which every man raised his left hand to his mouth, held his stomach up with the right one, and shouted all together:

"What?"

"Hold on now, boys; you needn't get so excited over nothing; just keep cool for a minute, and I'll tell you 'What,'" re-

sponded Scotty. "I've made a mistake," he said.

"Made a mistake?" interrupted the crowd, alarmingly.

"Yes!—you see it was just like this; there were two bottles behind my trunk at the time; but in the hurry of the moment I, unfortunately, picked up the wrong one and handed it to Frankinton. That one, I regret to tell you, contained German rot-gut imitation brandy I had purchased to give the butcher of the *Crescent City*, in return for a keg of 'blue points' he had brought for me from New York; the other bottle, which I bought for my own personal delectation, is behind my trunk now." With which announcement the boys were simply astounded; but Frankinton, who had determined within himself, come what may, not to be outwitted by Scotty, turned quickly around and winked at Hudsin one of those deep-meaning winks of his in which there was the reflection of further plot and conspiracy! Hudsin, who was standing at the doorway at the moment, interpreting the



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signal immediately, left the crowd unnoticed and went into Scotty's room on tip-toe, and took the other bottle of brandy away and hid it in his own apartment.

When Scotty returned to his room again he discovered that the other bottle had vanished also; but never a word, afterwards, did he say to the boys in connection with the incident, in which his bluff about the *Crescent City* bottle had not worked out at all, and in which he had been completely vanquished.

