

Latest Craig Kennedy Detective Story

BY ARTHUR B. REEVE.

THE GUN-RUNNER

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"With the treaty ratified, if the deal goes through we'll all be rich." Something about the remark which came over the babel of voices arrested Kennedy's attention. For one thing it was a woman's voice and it was not the sort of remark to be expected from a woman, at least not in such a place. Craig had been working pretty hard and began to show the strain. We had taken an evening off and now had dropped in after the theatre at the Burridge, one of the most frequented night spots on Broadway.

At the table next to us—and the tables at the Burridge were so close that one almost rubbed elbows with those at the next—sat a party of four, two ladies in evening gowns and two men in immaculate black and white.

"I hope you are right, Leontine," returned one of the men, with an English accent. "The natural place for the islands is under the American flag, anyway."

"Yes, put in the other; 'the people have voted for it before. They want it.'"

It was at that time that the American and Danish governments were negotiating about the transfer of the Danish West Indies, and quite evidently they were discussing the islands. The last speaker seemed to be a Dane, but the woman with him, evidently his wife, was not. It was a curious group, worth more than a passing glance. For a moment Craig watched them closely.

"That woman in blue," he whispered, "is a typical promoter."

There were plenty of other types in the brilliantly lighted dining-room, and we did not dwell long on the study of our neighbors. A few moments later Kennedy left me and was visiting another table. It was a habit of his, for he had hundreds of friends and acquaintances, and the Burridge was the place to which every one came.

This time I saw that he had stopped before some one whom I recognized. It was Captain Marlowe of the American Shipping Trust, to whom Kennedy had been of great assistance at the time of the launching of his great ship, the Usona, and he was accompanied by a man whose face was unfamiliar to me.

As I recognized who it was to whom Kennedy was speaking, I also rose and made my way over to the table. As I approached, the captain turned from Kennedy and greeted me cordially.

"Mr. Whitson," he introduced the man with him. "Mr. Whitson is sailing tomorrow for St. Thomas on the Arroyo. We're preparing to extend our steamship lines to the islands as soon as the formalities of the purchase are completed."

Marlowe turned again to Kennedy and went on with the remark he had evidently been making.

"Of course," I heard him say, "you know we have Mexico practically blockaded as far as arms and ammunition go. Yet, Kennedy, through a secret channel I know that thousands of rounds of arms and millions of rounds of ammunition are filtering in there. It's shameful. I can't imagine anything more traitorous. Whoever is at the bottom of it ought to swing. It isn't over the border that they are going. We know that. The troops are there. How is it, then?"

A few moments later we shook hands and returned to our own table. We paid our check and were about to leave.

"Hello!" greeted a familiar voice beside us. "I've been looking all over town for you. They told me you had gone to the theatre and I thought I might possibly find you here."

We turned. It was our old friend Burke, of the Secret Service, accompanied by a stranger.

"I'd like you to meet Mr. Sydney, the new special consular agent whom the government is sending to the Danish West Indies to investigate and report on trade conditions." He introduced. "We're off for St. Thomas on the Arroyo, which sails tomorrow noon."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Kennedy. "Is everybody daffy over those little islands? What takes you down there, Burke?" Burke looked about hastily, then drew us aside into a recess in the lobby.

"I don't suppose you know," he explained, lowering his voice, "but since these negotiations began, the consular service has been keenly interested in the possibilities on the islands. The government sent one special agent there, named Dwight. Well, he died a few days ago. It was very suspicious, so much so that the authorities in the islands investigated. Yet the doctors have found no evidence of anything wrong, no poison. Still, it is very mysterious, and, you know," he hinted, "there are those who don't want us down there."

The Secret Service man paused as though he had put the case as briefly and pointedly as he could, then went on: "I've been assigned to accompany the new consul down there and investigate. I've no particular orders and the chief will honor any reasonable expense account—but—" He hesitated and stopped, looking keenly at Kennedy's face. I saw what he was driving at.

"Well—to come to the point—what I wanted to see you about, Kennedy, is to find out whether you would go with me. I think," he added, persuasively, "it would be quite worth your while. Besides, you look tired. You're working too hard. The change will do you good. And your conscience needs a little rest. You'll be working all right."

Kennedy smiled as he read the

other's enthusiasm. "I'd like to think the proposal over," he conceded, much to my surprise. "I'll let you know in the morning."

"Mind," wheedled Burke, "I won't take no for an answer. We need you." I went to bed, tired, but through the night I knew Craig was engaged on some work about which he seemed to be somewhat secretive. When I saw him again in the laboratory, in the morning, he had before him a large packing-case of stout wood bound with steel bands.

"What's that?" I asked, mystified. He opened the lid, a sort of door, on which was a strong lock, and I looked inside.

"My traveling laboratory," he remarked, with pride.

"Then you are going with Burke to St. Thomas?" I queried.

Kennedy nodded. "I've been thinking what I would do if an important case ever called me away. Burke's proposal hurried me, that's all. And you are going, also," he added. "You have until noon to break the news to the Star."

Thus it came about that Craig and I found ourselves in the forenoon in a taxicab, on the front of which was loaded the precious box as well as our other hastily packed luggage, and we were on our way to Brooklyn to the dock from which the Arroyo sailed. Already the clearance papers had been obtained, and there was the usual last-moment confusion among the passengers as the hour for sailing approached. It seemed as if we had scarcely boarded the ship when Kennedy was as gay as a school-boy on an unexpected holiday. I realized at once what was the cause. The change of scene, the mere fact of cutting loose, were having their effect.

As we steamed slowly down the bay, I ran my eye over the other passengers as they gazed at the towers of New York. There were Burke and Sydney, but they were not together, and, to all appearances, did not know each other. Sydney, of course, could not conceal his identity, nor did he wish to, no matter how beset with unseen perils might be his mission. But Burke was down on the passenger list as, and had assumed the role of a traveling salesman for a mythical agency in Chicago. That evidently had agreed on between themselves. Kennedy took the cue.

As I studied the various groups I paused suddenly, surprised. There was the party which had set at the table next to us at the Burridge the night before.

Just then Craig joggled my elbow. He had caught sight of Whitson edging his way in our direction. I saw what it was that Craig meant. He wanted introductions to come about naturally as they do on shipboard if one only waits.

On deck and in the lounging and smoking rooms it did not take long for him to contrive ways of meeting and getting acquainted with those he wished to know, without exciting suspicion. Thus, by the time we sat down to dinner in the saloon we were all getting fairly chummy.

We had met Burke quite as naturally as if we were total strangers. It was easy to make it appear that Whitson and Sydney were shipboard acquaintances. Nor was it difficult to secure an introduction to the other party of four. The girl whom we had heard addressed as Leontine seemed to be the leader of the group. Leontine Cowell was a striking personality. I was never quite sure whether she resembled seeing us at the Burridge, whether she penetrated the parts we were playing. She was none the less feminine because she had aspirations in a commercial way.

Her companion, Barrett Burieligh, was a polished, deferential Englishman, one of those who seem to be citizens of the world rather than subjects of any particular country.

Jorgen Erickson was, as I had surmised, a Dane. He proved to be one of the largest planters in the island, already wealthy and destined to be wealthier if real estate advanced. The other woman, Nanette, was his wife. She was also a peculiarly interesting type, a Frenchwoman from Guadeloupe. Younger and more vivacious than her husband, her snappy black eyes betokened an attractive personality.

Leontine Cowell, it seemed, had been in the islands not long before, had secured options on some score of plantations at a low figure, and made no secret of her business. When the American flag at last flew over the islands she stood to win out of the increase of land values a considerable fortune.

Erickson also, in addition to his own holdings, had been an agent for some other planters and thus had met Leontine, who had been the means of interesting some American capital.

As for Burieligh, it seemed that he had made the acquaintance of Leontine in Wall Street. He had been in the Caribbean and the impending changes in the Danish West Indies had attracted his notice. Whether he had some money to invest in the speculation or hoped to profit by commissions derived from sales did not appear. But at any rate some common bond had thrown the quartet together.

It must have been the second day out that I observed Leontine and Sydney together on the promenade deck. They seemed to be quite interested in each other, though I felt sure that Leontine was making a play for him.

At any rate, Burieligh was jealous. Whatever might be the scheme, it was apparent that the young Englishman was head over heels in love with her.

What did it mean? Was she playing with Sydney, seeking to secure his influence to further her schemes? Or did it mask some deeper, more sinister motive?

Busy with my speculations, I was astonished soon after to realize that the triangle had become a hexagon, so to speak. Whitson and Nanette Erickson seemed to be much in each other's company. But unlike Burieligh, Erickson seemed to be either oblivious or complacent.

Whatever it might all portend, I found that it did not worry Kennedy, although he observed closely. Burke, however, was considerably excited and even went so far as to speak to Sydney, over whom he felt a sort of guardianship. Sydney turned the matter off lightly. As for me, I determined to watch both of these women closely.

Kennedy spent much time not only in watching the passengers, but in going about the ship, talking to the captain and crew and every one who knew anything about the islands. In fact, he collected enough information in a few days to have satisfied any ordinary tourist for weeks.

Even the cargo did not escape his attention, and I found that he was especially interested in the rather heavy shipments of agricultural implements that were consigned to various planters in the islands.

It was the evening after one of Kennedy's busy days scouting about that

Kennedy, innocently, while there flashed over me, what he had discovered about shipments of agricultural implements.

Erickson shook his head. "Some of them may be. But for one that is, I know twenty whose only thought is to sell out and take a profit."

The conversation trailed off on other subjects and I knew that Kennedy had acquired the information which he sought. As neatly as I could I drew him apart from Erickson.

"Strange he should tell me that," ruminated Kennedy. "I know that there is a lot of stuff consigned to planters in the island, some even to himself."

"He must be lying, then," I hastened. "Perhaps, these promoters are really plotters. By the way, what I wanted to tell you was that I saw Sydney and Leontine together again."

He was about to reply when the sound of someone approaching caused us to draw back farther into the shadow. It proved to be Whitson and Nanette.

"Then you do not like St. Thomas?" we heard Whitson remark, as if he were repeating something she had just said.

"There is nothing there," she replied. "Why, there aren't a hundred miles of good roads and not a dozen automobiles. St. Croix, where we have the plantation, is just as bad. Part of the time we live there, part of the time at Charlotte Amalie in St. Thomas. But there is little difference. I hope Jorgen is able to sell. At least I

Kennedy smiled. "Burieligh doesn't seem to approve of everything, though," he remarked.

"Perhaps not. That's one reason why I think it may be more dangerous for Sydney than he realizes. I know she's son to watch out for her. But I can't talk to Sydney," he sighed.

It was an enigma and I had not solved it, though I felt much as Burke did. Kennedy seemed to have determined to allow events to take their course, perhaps in the hope that developments would be quicker that way than by interfering with something which we did not understand.

In the smoking-room, after we left Burke, Kennedy and I came upon Erickson and Burieligh. They had just finished a game of poker with some of the other passengers, in which Burieligh's usual run of luck and skill had been with him.

"Lucky at cards, unlucky in love," remarked Burieligh as we approached.

He said it with an air of banter, yet I could not help feeling that there was a note of seriousness at the bottom of it. Had he known that Leontine had been with Sydney on the deck? His very success at poker had some subtle effect on him as if he had been one of the transatlantic crook sharps, perhaps an international card, yet I had nothing on which to base such a judgment.

Erickson presented a different problem to my mind. Either he had not been perfectly frank with us in regard to the improvement of his properties or he was concealing something much

saw that Whitson had taken the occasion also to thank Mrs. Erickson, with whom he had been talking, just a bit apart from the group. He made no secret of his attentions, though I thought she was a bit embarrassed by them at such a time. When she started to rejoin the group I noted that she had forgotten her handbag, which lay near where she was sitting.

I picked it up to restore it. Some uncontrollable curiosity prompted me, as all were still looking at the town, to open the bag. Inside was a little bottle of grayish liquid. Hastily I pulled off the cap of my fountain pen and poured into it some of the liquid. Whether either she or anyone else had observed me, or was not going to run any chance of being seen, I called a passing steward. "Mrs. Erickson forgot her bag," I said; you'll find her over there with Mr. Whitson. She betrayed no anxiety as she received it.

I lost no time in getting to Kennedy and telling him what I had found, and a few moments later he made an excuse to go to our stateroom, as eager as I to know what was in the bottle.

First he poured a drop of the liquid from the cap of my fountain pen in some water. It did not dissolve. Successively he tried alcohol, ether, then kerosene. None had any effect on it. Finally he dissolved it in ammonia. "Relatively high amount of sulphur," he muttered, after a few moments more of study. "Keratin, I believe."

"Poison?" I asked.

Craig shook his head. "No, harmless." "Then what is it for?"

He may have had some half-formed idea, but all he did was to place the same in his traveling laboratory, close and lock it, and we were ready to be taken ashore. Nearly every one had some ashore by the time we returned to the deck. Whitson was there yet, talking to the captain, for the shipping at the port interested him.

Kennedy seemed eager now to get ashore, and we went, accompanied by Whitson, and after some difficulty established ourselves at a small hotel.

Burke was waiting for us, and in spite of his playing the role of traveling salesman managed to direct us about so that we might as quickly as possible pick up the thread of the mysterious death of Dwight. It did not take us long to gather such meager information as there was about the autopsy that had followed the strange death of Sydney's predecessor.

No trace of anything out of the way had been found, and there the matter had rested, except for suspicion. One of our first visits was to the American consulate, where Sydney, by virtue of his special commission, had established himself. There seemed to be no clue to the mysterious death of Dwight. All that we were able to discover, after some hours of digging, was that Dwight had suffered from great prostration, marked cyanosis, convulsions and coma. Whether the result of some strange disease or a poison no one was prepared to say. All that was known was that the blow, if blow it had been, was swift, sudden, sure.

We ran across Whitson once or twice during the day, busily engaged renewing acquaintances with merchants and planters he had known before; but I do not recall having seen either Burieligh or Leontine, who I thought rather strange, for the town was small and strangers few.

Erickson had invited us to come late in the afternoon to the dinner, and we did not delay in getting there. His house proved to be a veritable palace on the side of one of the hills rising abruptly from the shore. The Ericksons were proud of their home, as well they might be, in spite of the complaints we had heard Nanette utter and the efforts of Erickson to sell his holdings. Mrs. Erickson proved to be a charming hostess, and the host extended a hospitality such as one but rarely meets.

Burieligh arrived proudly with Leontine, followed closely by Sydney. Whitson came. Burke and ourselves completed the party. Kennedy and I were passing along a colonnade that opened from the large dining hall, when Craig paused and looked at the massive table set for the dinner.

A servant had just completed setting the cocktails at the various places, and Burieligh, who had been talking with me, had been walking past through the colonnade since we arrived, but at the moment there was no one about, and even the servant had disappeared.

Kennedy stepped lightly into the dining hall and looked about sharply. He pulled from his pocket a clean linen handkerchief. Into an empty glass he poured the contents of one of the cocktail glasses, straining the liquid through the handkerchief. Then he poured the filtrate, if I may call it such, back into the original glass. A second he treated in the same way, and a third. He had nearly completed the round of the table when I heard a light step. My warning came only just in time. It was Burieligh. He saw us, made some hasty remark and walked on. Had it been interest in Leontine or in the dining room that had drawn him thither?

Kennedy was now looking closely at the handkerchief, and I looked also. In the glasses had been innumerable little seeds. The fine meshes of the linen had extracted them. What were they? I took one in my fingers and crushed it. There was an unmistakable odor of bitter almonds. What did it mean?

How I managed to get through that dinner I do not know. It was a brilliant affair. After the coffee Kennedy managed to make some excuse for us to leave. In the secrecy of our room in the little hotel Craig was soon making use of his traveling laboratory.

"What about the little bottle of keratin?" I asked eagerly.

"Oh, yes," he replied, not looking up from the tests he was making. "Well, keratin, you know, is also called epiderm. It is a scleroprotein present largely in cuticular structure such as hair, nails, horn. I believe it is usually prepared from pieces of horn soaked in pepsin, hydrochloric acid and water for a long time. Then the residue is dissolved in ammonia and acetic acid. 'The pepsin of the stomach won't digest it,' he returned. "For that reason it is used for coating what are known as 'enteric capsules.' Anything coated with keratin is carried on through the stomach into the intestines."

"What are the seeds? Have you found any?"

"There seem to be two kinds. Some of them are quite harmless. But there are others that have been soaked in nitro-benzol—artificial oil of bitter almonds. Even a few drops, such as might be soaked up in this way, might be fatal. They were all carefully coated with keratin. Really, they are keratin-coated enteric capsules of nitro-benzol—a deadly poison."

I looked at him, aghast at what some of us had been rescued from by his prompt action.

"You see," he went on, "that is why the autopsies probably showed nothing. These doctors down here sought for a poison in the stomach; but if the poison had been in the stomach, the odor alone would have betrayed it. You smell it when you crushed a seed. But the poisoning had been devised to avoid just that chance of discovery. There was no poison in the stomach. Death was delayed long enough, also, to divert suspicion from the real poisoner. Some one has been diabolically clever in covering up the crimes."

I could only gasp my amazement. "Then," I blurted out, "you think the Ericksons—"

"Our door burst open. It was Burke!" he exclaimed, pointing to the open window. For a moment I gazed at the sight blankly. Then I realized that sweeping on us was one of those sudden, deadly West Indian hurricanes. We hurried out to the street. The Ericksons had just driven up with Burieligh and Leontine, as well as Whitson and Sydney.

On the horizon an ugly, dark cloud loomed menacingly. In the strange, unearthly murkiness I could see people pouring out into the narrow streets. Leontine had hurried into the hotel. Suddenly, without further warning the storm broke. Trees were turned up by the roots, and buildings rocked as if they were houses of cards.

"Leontine," I heard a voice mutter by my side. It was Burieligh.

I was literally picked up and hurled against an object in the darkness—a man. In the room—more keratin—more seeds! It was Kennedy. He had made a search in the confusion which otherwise would have been more difficult.

Just then came a crash as the hotel crumpled under the fierce stress of the storm. Out of the doorway struggled a figure just in time to clear the falling walls. It was Burieligh, a huge gash from a beam on his forehead. In his arms clinging about his neck, was Leontine, no longer the sophisticated, but in the face of this primeval danger just a woman, gasping my amazement.

"My God!" exclaimed a thick voice as an arm pointed toward the harbor. There was the Arroyo, tugging at every extra mooring that could be impressed into service. The lighters had broken or been cut away, and were scudding squarely at the shore below us. A moment and they had crashed on the beach, while the great waves tore open and fung about heavy cases as though they were mere toys.

Then, almost as suddenly as it had come the storm began to abate, the air cleared, and nothing remained but the fury of the waves.

"Look!" exclaimed Kennedy, pointing down at the strange wreckage that strewn the beach. "Does that look like agricultural machinery?"

We strained our eyes. Kennedy did not pause.

"The moment I heard that arms were getting through into Mexico I suspected that somewhere here in the Caribbean munitions were being transhipped. Perhaps they have been sent to Atlantic ports ostensibly for the Allies. They have got down here disguised. From this port, the key to the vast sweep of mainland, I reasoned that they were taken over to secret points on the coast, where big ships could not safely go. It was here that blockade runners were raffled in our Civil War. It is here that this new gun-running plot has been laid."

"The only obstacle between the transfer of the arms and success was the activity of an American consulate. Those lighters were not to carry goods to other island; they were really destined for Mexico. It was profitable. And the scheme for removing opposition was evidently safe."

Kennedy was holding up another bottle of keratin and some fruit seeds. "I found these in a room in the hotel," he added.

I did not comprehend. "But," I cut in, "the handbag, the dinner—what of them?"

"A plant—a despicable trespass on hospitality; all part of a scheme to throw guilt on some one else, worthy of a renegade and traitor!"

Craig wheeled suddenly, then added: "I suppose you knew that there were reputed to have been on one of the hills the headquarters of the old pirate Teach—the mildest mannered man I ever scuttled a ship or cut a throat?"

Kennedy paused, then added quickly: "In respect to covering up your gun-running, Whitson, you are superior even to Teach!"



"He poured the contents of one of the cocktail glasses."

he quietly summoned both Burke and Sydney to our cabin.

"There's something queer going on," announced Craig, when he was sure that we were all together without being observed. "Frankly, I must confess that I don't understand it—yet."

"You needn't worry about me," interrupted Sydney, hastily. "I can take care of myself."

Kennedy smiled quietly. We knew what Sydney meant. He seemed to resent Burke's solicitude over his acquaintance with Leontine and was evidently warning us off. Kennedy, however, avoided the subject.

"I may as well tell you," he resumed, "that I was quite as much influenced by a rumor that arms were somehow getting into Mexican ports as I was by your appeal, Burke, in coming down here. So far I've found nothing that proves my case. But, as I said, there is something under the surface which I don't understand. We have all got to stick together, trust no one but ourselves, and, above all, keep our eyes open."

It was all that was said, but I was relieved to note that Sydney seemed greatly impressed. Still, half an hour later, I saw him sitting in a steamer chair beside Leontine again, watching the beautiful play of the moonlight on the now almost tropical ocean after we had emerged from the Gulf Stream.

Seeking Kennedy, I found him at last in the smoking-room, to my surprise talking with Erickson. I joined them, wondering how I was to convey to Craig what I had just seen without exciting suspicion. They were discussing the commercial and agricultural future of the islands, under the American flag, especially the sugar industry, which had fallen into a low estate.

"I suppose," remarked Kennedy, casually, "that you are already modernizing your plant and that others are doing the same, getting ready for a revival."

Erickson received the remark stolidly. "No," he replied, slowly. "Some of us may be doing so, but as for me, I shall be quite content to sell if I can get my price."

"The planters are not putting in modern machinery, then?" queried

more sinister. Again and again my mind reverted to the hints that had been dropped by Marlowe, and I recalled the close scrutiny Whitson had given the four that night. So far, I had felt that in any such attempt we might count on Whitson playing a lone hand at all stages of the game.

It was the morning of the last day of the voyage. Most of the passengers gathered on the deck for the first glimpse of the land to which we had been journeying.

Before us lay the beautiful and picturesque harbor and town of Charlotte Amalie, one of the finest harbors in the West Indies, deep enough to float the largest vessels, with shipyards, drydocks and repair shops.

From the dock it was a strikingly beautiful picture, formed by three spurs of mountains covered with the greenest of tropical foliage. From the edge of the dancing blue waves the town itself rose on the hills, presenting an entrancing panorama.

There was much to watch, but I let nothing interfere with my observation of how the affair between Sydney and Leontine was progressing. To my surprise, I saw that this morning she was bestowing the favor of her smile rather on Burieligh.

Erickson was standing beside Sydney, while we were not far away. Evidently he had been saving up a speech for the occasion and was now prepared to deliver it.

"Mr. Sydney," he began with a wave of his arm that seemed to include us all. "It is a pleasure to welcome you here to our island. Last night it occurred to me that we ought to do something to show that we appreciate it. You must come to dinner to-night at my villa here in town. You are all invited—all of us who have become so enjoyably acquainted on this voyage, which I shall never forget. Believe me when I say that it will be even more a tribute to you personally than because of the official position you are to hold among us."

It was a graceful invitation, more so than I had believed Erickson capable of framing. Sydney could do nothing less than accept and thank him cordially, as we all did.

While we were thanking Erickson I

should like to live a part of the year in the States."

"Would he like that, too?"

"Many of us would," she replied, quickly. "For many years things have been getting worse with us. Just now it seems a bit better because of the high price of sugar. But who knows how long that will last? Oh, I wish something would happen soon so that we might make enough money to live as I want to live. Think; here the best years of life are slipping away. Unless we do something soon, it will be too late! We must make our money soon."

There was an air of impatience in her tone, of restless dissatisfaction. I felt that there was an element of danger, too, in a woman just passing from youth making a confident of a man.

It was a mixed situation with the quartet whom we were watching. One thing was sufficiently evident. They were all desperately engaged in the pursuit of wealth. That was a common bond. Nor had I seen anything to indicate that they were over scrupulous in that pursuit. Within half an hour I had seen Leontine with Sydney and Nanette with Whitson. Both Sydney as consular agent and Whitson through his influence with the shipping trust possessed great influence. Had the party thought it out and were they now playing the game with the main chance in view?

I looked inquiringly at Kennedy as the voices died away while the couple walked slowly down the deck. He said nothing, but he was evidently pondering deeply on some problem, perhaps that which the trend of affairs had raised in my own mind.

Our delay had not been long, but it had been sufficient to cause us to miss finding Leontine and Sydney. We did, however, run across Burke, apparently much troubled.

"I don't like this business," he confessed, as we passed to compare experiences. "I've been thinking of that Mexican business you hinted at, Kennedy. You know the islands would be an ideal, out-of-the-way spot from which to start gun-running expeditions to Mexico. I don't like this Leontine and Burieligh. They want to make money too bad."

The title of the next story in this series is "The Sunken Treasure"—XII