



"I Own It," He Says.

MR. PRATT.
By Joseph C. Lincoln
Author of "CAPTAIN PARTNERS OF THE TIDE"
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SYNOPSIS.

Mr. Solomon Pratt began comical narration of story, introducing well-to-do Nathan Scudder of the town, and Edward Van Brunt and Martin Hartley, two rich New Yorkers seeking rest. Because of latter pair's lavish expenditure of money, Pratt's first impression was connected with lunatics. The arrival of James Hopper, Van Brunt's valet, gave Pratt the desired information about the New Yorkers. They wished to live what they termed "The Natural Life." Van Brunt, it was learned, was the successful suitor for the hand of Miss Agnes Page, who gave Hartley up. "The Heavenly" heard a long story of the domestic woes of Mrs. Hannah Jane Furlis, their cook and maid of all work. Decide to let her go and engage Sol Pratt as chef. Twins agree to leave Nate Scudder's abode and begin unavailing search for another domicile. Adventure at Fourth of July celebration at Eastwich. Hartley rescued a boy, known as "Reddy," from under a tree's feet and the urchin proved to be one of Miss Page's charges, whom she had taken to the country for an outing. Miss Page and Hartley were separated during a fierce storm, which followed the picnic. Out sailing later, Van Brunt, Hartley, Pratt and Hopper were wrecked in a squall.

sick," he says. "Then he'll have to stay longer than the month."

Trust Nate Scudder to see a silver lining to any cloud—and then rip out the lining and put it in his pocket.

By this time he was beating in towards where the Neck Road comes down to the beach. And there on the shore was a feller hailing us. And when we got close in it turned out to be Hartley himself.

He was glad enough to see me, but when he found that Van and Lord James had turned up missing he was in a state. He'd been kind of scared when we didn't come back during the night and had walked down to the beach in the morning to see if he could sight us.

We headed off shore again. Nate watched Hartley pretty close and I suppose when he seen that the Twin didn't show any symptoms of getting sick, he begun to worry again. He got out a piece of pencil and an old envelope and commenced to figure.

"Mr. Hartley," says he, after awhile; "about them lady friends of yours over to Eastwich. Do you cal'late they're going to like where they are? Seems to me a place that's as easy to run away from as that ain't the best place for a boys' school. If it was on an island now, the scholars couldn't run off. I know a nice island they could have cheap. Fact is, I own it—that is, Huldy owns it; it's in her name. That's it over there."

Hartley didn't answer. I looked where Nate was pointing.

"Oh!" says I. "Horsefoot Bar. That's a healthy place for a school. Might do for a reform school maybe, if you wa'n't particular how the reforming was done."

Horsefoot Bar is a little island about five miles from the Old Home House, a mile and a half from the mainland, and two foot from the jumping-off place. By the help of Providence, decent weather, a horse, two whips, and a boat, you can make it from Well-mouth depot in three hours. And when you have made it, you can set in the sand and hang on to your hat and listen to the lonesomeness. I'd forgot that Scudder owned it. When him and I sailed up that morning we'd passed it on the outside; now we was between it and the beach.

"It's a nice dry place," says Nate, arguing, "and you might live there forever and nobody could run away."

"Humph!" says I, thinking of something I'd seen in a newspaper; "Hell's got all them recommendations."

Hartley was looking at the Bar now. All to once he grabbed me by the arm and pointed.

"Sol," he says, "what's that sticking up over the point there? There, behind those trees? Isn't it a boat's mast?"

I looked, and looked once more. From where we was you could see a part of Horsefoot Bar that was out of sight from the rest of the bay. As I say, I looked. Then I gave the tiller a shove that brought the boom across with a slam. It took Nate's hat with it and cracked him on the bald spot like thumping a ripe watermelon. Nate grabbed for the hat and I drove the yawl for Horsefoot Bar. I'd spied the Dora Bassett's mast over the sand-spit.

In a jiffy we see her plain. She was lying on her side in a little cove, just as the tide had left her. Her canvas was down in a heap, partly on deck and partly overboard, but she didn't seem to be hurt none. I beached the yawl just alongside of her, dropped

the sail, chucked over the anchor and jumped over myself. Hartley and Scudder followed. We was yelling like loons.

Up through the bunch of scrub pines we tore, still hollering. And then, from away off ahead somewheres, come the answer. I was so tickled I could have stood on my head.

In a minute here comes Lord James to meet us. His lordship looked yellow and faded, like a wilted sunflower, and his whiskers seemed to be running to seed. But his dignity was on deck all right.

"Mr. 'Artley," says he, touching what was left of his hat; "ope you're well, sir."

"Where's Van?" asked Hartley, brisk.

"Mr. Van Brunt, sir? Up at the 'ouse, waiting for you, sir."

"The house?" says Hartley.

"The house?" says I. Then I remembered.

There is a house on Horsefoot Bar. It was built by old man Marcellus Berry, and in Marcellus' day they built houses, didn't stick 'em together with wall paper and a mortgage, like they do now. Consequence is that, though the winter weather on Horsefoot made Marcellus lay down a considerable spell ago, his house still stands, as pert and sassy an old gable-ended jall as ever was. The house was there, and Scudder owned it. Likewise he owned the sheds and barn in the back, and the sickly bunch of scrub pines, and the beach plum bushes, and the beach grass and the poverty grass and the world-without-end of sand that all these things was stuck up in. As for the live stock, that was seven thousand hop-toads, twenty million sand fleas, and green-heads and mosquitoes for ever and ever, amen.

We fell into the valet's wake and waded through the sand hummocks up to the house. And there on the piazza, sitting in a busted cane-seat chair with his feet cocked up on the railing and the regulation cigar in his mouth, was Van Brunt, kind of damp and wrinkled so far as clothes went, but otherwise as serene and chipper a Robinson Crusoe as the average man is likely to strike in one life time.

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Wa'n't we glad to see him! And he was just as glad to see us.

"Hello, skipper," says he, reaching out his hand. "So you got ashore all right. Good enough. I was a bit fearful for you after you left us last night."

After I left him! I liked that. And he was fearful for me.

"Humph!" says I. "I had a notion that 'twas you that did the leaving. Talk about dropping an acquaintance! I never was dropped like that afore! Look here, Mr. Van Brunt, afore you and me go to sea together again we'll have a little lesson in running rigging. I want to learn you what a main-sheet is."

"Oh," he says, careless like, "I guess I found it, after a while. At any rate if it's a rope I cut it. I cut all the ropes in sight."

"You did?" says I, with my mouth open.

"Yes. That's an acrobatic boat of yours; it seemed to want to turn somersets. I judged that that sail made it top-heavy so I told James to take the sail down. He didn't know how but we decided that the ropes must have something to do with it. So I cut 'em, one after the other, and the sail came down."

"Sudden?" says I.

"Well, fairly so. Some of it was in the water and the rest of it on James. I resurfected him finally and we pulled most of it into the boat. It went better then."

"Did, hey?" says I. I was learning seamanship fast.

"Yes," says he. "If I were you I wouldn't have any sail on that boat. She does much better without one. Then it began to rain and I got some of the dry sail over me. I believe I went to sleep then—or soon after."

Nate Scudder's eyes was big as preserve dishes. I guess mine was bigger still.

"Good Lord!" says I. "Did his—did James go to sleep too?"

"No," says Van. "I think not. I believe James was holding some sort of religious service. How about it, James?"

His lordship looked sheepish. "Well, sir," he says. "I don't know, sir. I may have been a bit nervous; I'm not used to a boat, sir."

"I shouldn't mind your praying, James," Van says, sober as a deacon; "if you didn't yell so. However, we got here on this island about five o'clock, I believe. Rather, the boat came here herself; we didn't have anything to do with it."

I never in my life! They say the Almighty looks out for the lame and the lazy. Van Brunt wa'n't lame, but—

"Well," says I. "I'll believe in special Providences after this."

Van jumped out of the chair.

"By George!" he sings out. "Talking of special providences; Martin, come here."

He grabbed t'other Twin by the arm and led him down off the piazza and up to the top of a little hill near the house. The rest of us followed without being invited. I know you couldn't have kept me back with a chain cable. I haven't visited many asylums and I wanted to see the patients perform.

"Look here, Martin," says Van, when we got to the top of the hill. "Look around you."

We all looked, I guess; I know I did. There was the old Berry house, square and weatherbeat and gray. And there was a derelict barn and a half dozen pig pens and hen houses stranded alongside of it. And there was Horsefoot bar all around us for a half mile or so, sand and beach grass and hop-toads, all complete. And beyond on

one side was the bay, with the water looking blue and pretty in the forenoon sunshine. And on t'other side was the mile and a half strip we'd just sailed across, with the beach and mainland over yonder. Not a soul but us in sight anywheres. The whole lay-out would have made a first-rate photograph of the last place the Lord made; the one he forgot to finish.

"Look at it!" hollers Van. "Look at it! Now what is it?"

I begun to be sorry the keeper hadn't arrived that time when I thought he was coming. I cal'lated he was needed right now. Martin seemed to think so, too. He looked puzzled.

"What is it?" he says. "What's what? What do you mean?"

"Why this whole business. Island and house and scenery and quiet and all. You old blockhead!" hollers Van, giving the other Twin an everlasting bang on the back; "Don't you see? It's what we've been looking for all these weeks—it's the pure, unadulterated, accept-no-imitations Natural Life!"

I set down in the sand. Things were coming too fast for me. If this kept on I'd be counting my fingers and playing cat's cradle along with the rest of the loons pretty soon. I knew it.

But, would you believe it, Martin Hartley didn't seem to think his chum was out of his mind. He fetched a long breath.

"By Jove!" he says, slow; "I don't know but you're right."

"Right? You bet I'm right! It's been growing on me ever since I landed. We'll be alone; no females, native or imported, to bother us. Here's a bully old house with some furniture, bedsteads and so on, already in it. I broke a window and climbed in for a rummage. Jolliest old ark you ever saw. Here's a veranda to sit on, and air to breathe, and a barn for a cow and plenty of room for a garden and chickens—whew! Man alive, it's Paradise! And I want to locate the man that owns it. I want to find him quick!"

He didn't have to say it but once. Nate Scudder was so full of joy that he had to shove his hands in his pockets to keep from hugging himself.

"I own it," he says.

"You do! Scudder, you're a gem. I begin to love you like a brother. Martin and I hire this place; do you understand? It's ours from this minute, for as long as we want it."

Nate commenced to hem and haw. "Well, I don't know," he says. "I don't know's I ought to let you have it. There's been considerable many folks after it, and—"

"Never mind. They can't have it. We outbid 'em. See?"

"What will we do for groceries?" asks Hartley, considering.

"Scudder'll bring 'em to us," says Van. "Won't you, Scudder?"

"Well, I don't know, Mr. Van Brunt. I'm pretty busy now, and—"

"We'll pay you for your time, of course."

"What about beds and cooking utensils and so on?" asks Hartley, considering some more.

"Scudder'll buy 'em for us somewhere."

"And milk, and eggs, and butter?"

"Scudder—till we get our own chickens and cow."

"And—er—well, a cook? Who'll do the cooking?"

Van Brunt stoops down and slaps me on the shoulder.

"Pratt," says he "Pratt will come here and cook for us, and navigate us, and be our general manager. Pratt's the boy!"

"Hold on there!" I sings out. "Avast heaving, will you. If you think for one minute that I'm going to quit my summer job to come to this hole and live, you're—"

"You're coming," says Van. "Never mind the price; we'll pay it. Now shut up! you're coming."

What can you say to a chap like that? I groaned.

"Live on Horsefoot Bar," I say. "Live on it!"

"Horsefoot Bar?" says Van. "Is that its name? Well, it's Horsefoot Bar no more. I've been evolving a name ever since I began to breathe here. Breathe, Martin," he says. "Draw a good breath. That's it. That's pure ozone. Gentlemen, permit me to introduce to you, Ozone Island."

Scudder grinned. He was feeling ready to grin at most anything just then.

"Ozone Island?" says Hartley. "Ozone Island. A restful name. Well, it's a restful spot. Isn't it, skipper?"

"Yes," says I. "As restful as being buried alive; and pretty nigh as pleasant."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

CHRISTMAS IN A GREAT CITY
BY BYRON WILLIAMS

In the metropolis Christmas treads upon the heels of Thanksgiving, eager to exploit its wares.

The windows of the great stores, that have been fringed with Autumn leaves, now present the entire gamut of holiday goods. Images of Santa Claus appear in bas reliefs, backed with reindeer and sledges, capacious chimneys and snug fire-places. Toys and sweetmeats run riot upon the counters, and the Christmas shopper appears mincingly in the long aisles of the great department stores. There are yet many days for making Christmas choices and the shopper has about her none of that mad, scrambling air so noticeable during the last few days of the runaway season.

In the streets Santa works at every corner, asking alms for the needy and the sick, that their Christmas, too, may be brightened and of good cheer. With the giving, the faces of the crowd take on a happier smile; the heart is answering to the message of "good will on earth." Inch by inch we are drawn into the merry-making, the bustle, and the spirit of the time. In our minds we are turning over and over the problem of what for this dear one and what for that—and in our list we include those who are less apt to be joyous on this day than we are—and now comes the real joy of Christmas: the doing of good that makes our hearts sing with happiness!

There is the little girl we met away up in the pine woods last summer who will be delighted with a pretty book, the lame boy who sells papers at the corner of Hit and Miss streets, the widow who takes in washing out in the suburb where we live, the jolly boy, friend of a business associate who has so many things one cannot just decide on his present, the elevator man who has met us morning and night with a cheery good morning and a respectful good night—and then there are the closer ones: the mother, father, wife and babies!

What a galaxy of needy folk—for all are needy on Christmas day! Those who do not need food, or clothing, or money, need something that will prove our love, prove that we have not forgotten them and that on this, the day commemorating the coming of the King of Bethlehem, our heart is attuned to theirs in gladness and rejoicing.

And now the holly and the mistletoe appear upon the street corners and rushing business men stop on their hurried way homeward to buy wreaths of the green and the red to hang in the windows of their homes and from the chandeliers of their living rooms.

On and on surges the spirit of Christmas!

Like a mighty enveloping shaft of sunshine, it breaks through the clouds of every-day mediocrity and racing across the world sends its glowing glory into every home! Garlands hang everywhere, bells chime and merry laughter echoes through the halls of time. And with the ringing of the crystal spheres, peace spreads her mantle like a cloak and plenty sits enthroned among the merry-making and the praise!

"Peace on earth, good-will to men."



CHRISTMAS IN THE COUNTRY
BY BYRON WILLIAMS

We hear of Christmas early in the country! No sooner have the days faded into twilight at six o'clock, than mother begins her needle-work. When the supper dishes are put away, she takes her place in the sitting room where father is reading his newspaper, drawing her work-basket toward her and begins to fashion things which only mother can make beautiful and useful!

"Christmas will be here before we know it," she smiles as father questions with his eyes.

"How time flies!" he comments, as he turns his paper.

Night after night she sews and knits and crochets—and no sooner are the children out of the house and her housework finished, than she goes quietly to some deep corner and brings out uncompleted presents for them, Mittens for Willie, laces for Nell, slippers for Dad. Guardedly she works, her ear sensitive to the least intrusion, of the slightest danger of a surprise.

And when the children come home after school, she hurries the work into a friendly frame, and turns her deft hands to the regular routine!

At the church the children hear of the Christmas tree and of the presents for everyone. The Sunday School takes up added numbers and the young men meet the young ladies to string popcorn and fashion decorations.

Delightful occupation! How, in the days now gone, all men have strung their hearts upon the threads and passed them awkwardly to rosy-checked maids with hair braided down their backs, with ruby lips and eyes that sparkled with the first love glances!

And the Christmas parties, the sleighrides, the renewing of friendships with those who have been away at school and have returned for the season of gayety and good cheer!

And the stockings that are hung on Christmas eve in the country! In every home they reap their harvest year by year on Christmas morning. Reap their harvest as the "Merry Christmas!" salutation rings throughout the house.

And it is mother, usually, that steals in upon the sleeping ones, and wishes them a glad and happy Christmas!

And always on Christmas morning she will do this! Though she be in the land of bliss beyond, or in the flesh of the present, she will speak to us of the Christmas morning, speak to us from her loving heart and wish us happiness. Nor time, nor death, nor changes, nor wars, nor misfortunes ever can take from a man this Christmas wish of mother's:

"A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!"

From the endless aeons of the turquoise sky she speaks to me on Christmas morning—and she speaks to you, too—but, mayhap, nearer by, for Christmas in the country is indissolubly associated with her. And for that reason, Christmas in the country is doubly dear to me—and doubly sacred.

"With trembling fingers did we weave
The holly round the Christmas hearth;
A rainy cloud possess'd the earth,
And sadly fell our Christmas-eve."

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