

The Fortune Hunter

(Editor's Note—For the benefit of those who may not have started to read this unusual story yesterday, The Bee re-publishes the first chapter and a second. Other chapters will appear each week.)

By RUBY AYRES.

The Fortune Hunter sat at the top of a five-barred gate, his hat at the back of his head, idly tapping his rough shabby brown boots with a rough stick which he had pulled from a hedge.

It was his eight-and-twentieth birthday, and he had exactly eight-and-twenty shillings in his pocket. Perhaps it was this fact that was responsible for the preoccupied look on his face and his total oblivion to the fact that the top of the gate was bordered with barbed wire to the exceeding danger of his already well-worn suit.

It was a warm evening in early September. The trees all around were beginning to be faintly tinged with autumn coloring, and a faint grey mist was rising from the bed of the river which flowed by on the other side of the field at his back.

Eight-and-twenty shillings. The Fortune Hunter took the coins from his pocket, looked at them, laughed, and jingled them back again.

He had been in many tight corners during the past 10 years of his roving life and always had managed to struggle out of them, but today somehow his usual optimism seemed to have failed him. Perhaps it was the silence all around that depressed him, for at any rate he sighed—a most unusual thing for the Fortune Hunter to do—and passed a hand wearily across his eyes.

For a fortnight now he had tramped England, waiting for something to turn up, for he was a firm believer in his luck, and this was the first time he had allowed himself even to consider the possibility that it might be going to fail him—and all the years.

To begin with, he was hungry, and hunger makes a man a pessimist more quickly than anything on earth; but there was a sort of unwillingness in his heart to break into that last eight-and-twenty shillings until he was absolutely forced to do so.

When things were at their worst, something always turned up—or so he felt, at least, had always been the case with him, and with the sort of feeling that he must get away from his thoughts and feelings, his growing depression, the Fortune Hunter jumped down from the gate and started walking up the road again.

He was a tall man and he looked like a gentleman in spite of the fact that his clothes were shabby and his boots wanted mending. Yet there was an undeniable air of breeding about him, and he walked with a fine, athletic swing, despite his weariness.

His hair was short-cropped and showed touches of grey here and there, and his face was burnt by exposure to sun and weather.

For a fortnight he had slept in woods or barns, or out in the hedges; anything served him for a bed; he had roughed it in all four corners of the world, and never quarrelled with the pillow provided by circumstances.

A little further on the road forked; one way leading straight along, was evidently the main road, and the other, turning into a narrower path, ultimately ending in a shady wood.

The Fortune Hunter hesitated, then turned into the wood, where neither heat nor dust had penetrated and everything was cool and fresh.

He took off his hat and let the soft air beat on his forehead, walking mechanically along until suddenly he tripped and almost fell over an obstacle half hidden in the thick bracken overhanging the narrow foot-path.

The Fortune Hunter recovered himself and swore good-naturedly, glancing down to see what had tripped him, then his face changed and he caught his breath on a muttered ejaculation as he saw the huddled form of a man lying face downward amongst the green undergrowth.

"Drunk!" was his first thought, and he half moved aside to pass on. Then some inexplicable instinct restrained him, and, stooping down, he pulled the tall bracken aside, peering more closely at the prostrate figure.

Another second passed, and he was on his knees beside it, his deft brown hands feeling under the coat for a heart beat, his tanned face pale with horror. For the man was dead.

The Fortune Hunter had seen death too many times to be mistaken, but it gave him an unusual shock to have come across it here in the heart of a shady English wood.

Turning the dead man gently over on his back, he looked into his face. Quite a young face it was and not unlike his own, he thought vaguely, with its clean-shaven lips and smooth skin, from which even death had not been able to obliterate the tan.

He wore a rough tweed suit that looked rather colonial in cut, and a soft gray hat lay a little distance off in the bracken.

The Fortune Hunter rose to his feet and stood looking around him with a feeling of helplessness. What ought he to do? Inform the police, he supposed. He turned his eyes again to the still form at his feet.

Whatever the cause of death, it had come peacefully enough, for the face was quite calm and unlined by pain and the lips a little parted as if in sleep.

If only someone would come along! The Fortune Hunter had no idea how far he was from the nearest village, but he was turning to retrace his steps to the main road, when he caught sight of a bulky package lying almost at his feet.

He stooped and picked it up. It was a shabby leather pocketbook, held together by an elastic band and bulging with papers or letters.

The Fortune Hunter turned it over uncertainly; then, with a little shrug of the shoulder, he pulled off the band and glanced through the contents.

There were a lot of pencil notes that seemed to relate to nothing in particular, and a jottings of various sums of money; a few letters, all in the same writing; an old photograph of a girl with hair tumbling about her shoulders; and on the fly-leaf of the pocketbook a name, evidently the name of the dead man, written in a sprawly hand—

"John Smith."

The Fortune Hunter smiled grimly. He had known many "John Smiths" in his wanderings, but seldom had it been the rightful name of the man who claimed it, and it was with the idea of finding some

he unfolded one of the letters and glanced casually through it. It obviously was written by a woman and bore a date four months previous:

"My Dear John: I know you will think that I have been a long time answering your last letter, but now you will soon be home again I am beginning to be afraid.

"Then years is a long time—and I was only 18 when you went away. Supposing you don't like me any more? Supposing I don't like you? Oh, I know there has been nobody else for either of us since, but I am afraid all the same. I was a child when you went away, and now I am a woman, though I don't feel so very much older, except when I look back on the days with you and realize how far away they really are.

"You must be patient with me, won't you? Don't expect too great things from me at first, although in spite of the fear, I am longing to see you, and somehow in my heart I think—I feel sure—it will be all right. I shan't write again—you will be home before you could get another letter. So it's just an revoir, dear—Anne"

The Fortune Hunter shrugged his shoulders and glanced again at the heading on the paper:

"Cherry Lodge, Somerton-on-Thames.

Not so far away then! He had a vague idea that he had seen a signpost to Somerton as he had tramped the last weary mile. He thrust the letters and shabby case into his pocket and turned on to the main road.

"Somehow, in my heart I feel sure it will be all right—" The words echoed through his mind rather pitiously.

Well, whoever "Anne" was, the dead meeting with John Smith would never take place now, for John Smith lay dead in the silent wood, with the tall bracken bending above him.

Old how deserted the road was. He stretched before the Fortune Hunter dusty and empty as he quickened his tired steps, anxious now to be rid of the responsibility of his discovery. But in half a mile he had failed to meet one pedestrian, though the road had curved about until it had brought him parallel with the river flowing silently by, bathed in the late evening light.

Some distance ahead the figure of a girl in a punt was clearly silhouetted against the sky, and the Fortune Hunter gave a little glow of satisfaction as he realized that he could not now be far from a village.

He watched the girl with a curious sense of satisfaction; she and the quiet river scene were so typically English, and he felt all at once how good it was to be home again—if one could call a country home where in a man had neither friends nor money.

The girl wore a white frock with short sleeves, and the rays of the setting sun glittered on her hair, turning it to gold, as her slim body moved with slow grace, propelling the little punt upstream.

There was someone with her—a man or a boy. The Fortune Hunter could not be sure which, for the figure was stooping over the side of the punt, watching something in the water; and across the silently-flowing river the man on the roadway could hear their voices distinctly through the still evening.

"If you'd only sit still, Tommy. You can't reach them—do, please!" And then came a shrill scream and a stifled cry, as the punt seemed to lurch violently.

The girl swayed dangerously, only recovering herself with a tremendous effort, but the other figure tumbled headlong into the water, without apparently making the least attempt to save itself.

"Serve him right!" thought the Fortune Hunter grimly, and stood still for a moment waiting for it to reappear.

But the seconds passed, and beyond a sort of swirl where the boy had disappeared there was no sign. The girl was on her knees in the punt now, screaming helplessly, and all at once the Fortune Hunter seemed to realize that the matter was serious and that the boy was in danger of drowning.

He ran along the road till he was almost abreast of the drifting punt, then he kicked off his shoes, flung his jacket aside and plunged into the river.

The girl saw him and stretched agonized hands to him. "Oh, save him—save him! He can't swim—he's a cripple!"

The Fortune Hunter was a powerful swimmer and the distance was nothing to him, but when he reached the boy, he had of about 17—it was not such an easy matter to bring him to shore.

But he managed it at last, and clambered out with the weed in his hair and water dripping from him. The girl regained her self-control and brought the punt to the bank, but she was very pale and her voice shook as she knelt down beside the exhausted boy.

"Oh, Tommy! Oh, are you all right? Oh, Tommy—I was so terrified."

She tried to put her arms round the boy's drenched figure but he repelled her almost roughly.

"Shut up!" he choked. "Leave me alone. It was your fault; you ought to have balanced the beastly boat better."

He looked a miserable enough object as he sat there in the long grass, shivering and shaking, and the Fortune Hunter felt a wave of contempt as he picked up the coat he had flung aside and calmly proceeded to put it on over his wet shirt.

The girl gave a little cry of horror. "You're not going! You can't go like that! You'll take your death of cold. Oh, please! We live quite close—you must come in and get dry."

The Fortune Hunter laughed. "I don't take cold easily—" his careless gaze wandered over the girl's concerned face, and, realizing his attraction, he added more graciously: "You're very kind—at any rate, I will help you home with your brother!"

"Yes, I am sure we can never thank you. You saved his life. Oh, Tommy, what should we have done if nobody had come along?"

The boy laughed harshly. "I should have drowned, that's

"He began to hoist himself up from the grass with difficulty, and the Fortune Hunter put a strong arm round him, and lifted him to his feet.

"Lean on me," he said, "I can carry you if you like, but . . . " "Thank you, I can walk," was the ungracious response. But he was glad of a helping hand before they had gone very far, and presently, without a word, the Fortune Hunter picked him up bodily and carried him the remainder of the way, the water running from both of them in uncomfortable little rivulets, leaving a trail along the dusty road.

The girl followed silently. From time to time she kept looking at the Fortune Hunter with queer, half-scared glances, and when they reached the house she ran ahead and opened the gate, standing aside to let him pass. It was an old-fashioned house, with ivy-colored walls and a garden sloping down to the river. Tubs filled with ivy geraniums bordered the terrace, and striped sun blinds were drawn over the windows of the house.

The Fortune Hunter cast a swift glance around him and wondered if this was the turn in his luck for which he had been waiting.

He followed the girl into the hall. It was cool and shady and rose-scented, and he put his burden down gently.

"You'd better have a hot bath at once," he said casually. "A ducking doesn't hurt me, I'm used to roughing it, but you . . . " The boy limped away towards the stairs without answering; he was an ungracious sort of youth, and his thin, delicate face was fretful and ill-tempered.

The girl looked up at the Fortune Hunter as he moved to the door. "I cannot let you go like this," she said decidedly. "You must change, too, and my uncle will like to see you and thank you."

"Tommy—my brother—is very delicate, you know—she paused—but, of course, you don't know," she added slowly.

The Fortune Hunter did not answer. He was a little puzzled by the girl's manner, and when presently he was shown into a bathroom and given a suit of dry clothes which, even if they were slightly on the small side, were a welcome change from his own damp garments, he found himself wondering whether by any chance in his wandering he could have met this girl before.

There was something in her eyes when she looked at him. He knit his brows. After all, he had known so many women. He dismissed the thought casually.

It was when he was trying to

wring out his own soaked garments and pull them into some semblance of shape again that he came across the pocketbook he had taken from the dead man in the woods.

For the moment he had forgotten that gruesome discovery, and it returned now to his memory unpleasantly.

"Cherry Lodge, Somerton-on-Thames. It must be somewhere near here, at all events; perhaps the girl downstairs could tell him where it was.

He opened the door and went to the hall.

The house was beautifully furnished, and the Fortune Hunter looked around him with envious eyes; it was many months since he had been in such surroundings.

He was standing at the bottom of the staircase, uncertain which way to go, when the girl came from a room on the right.

"Please come in," she said. There was a hint of nervousness in her voice, and the Fortune Hunter followed her with a faintly amused smile in his eyes.

She was very beautiful, he thought; and he liked her white frock and shoes and stockings and the pretty waves of her hair.

"There were wine and biscuits on the table, and she pressed him to take some."

"My uncle is out," she said "or I know he would make you welcome. I cannot thank you enough for what you have done. If you had not been there Tommy would have drowned."

"I am glad I was there then," he answered smiling.

There was a moment's silence; the girl was fidgeting nervously with her handkerchief; then, quite suddenly, she raised her eyes.

"Will you—will you tell me your name?" she asked.

The Fortune Hunter hesitated. He had answered to so many different names during his lifetime—few of them his own—then he half shrugged his shoulders. After all, what did a name matter?

"My name is John Smith," he said deliberately, with cynical memory of that moment in the woods when he had taken the pocketbook from a dead man.

But he was totally unprepared for the stifled cry which broke from the girl's lips, or for the little eager steps she took towards him her hands outstretched.

"I knew—I knew it was you," she said with a sobbing laugh.

Continued in The Evening Bee Tomorrow.

Swedish experimenters have abandoned efforts to use peat fiber in the textile industry until an economical method be found to extract the fiber from peat moss.

Commander and Six Members of Crew Hurt In Fire in Submarine

Los Angeles, Nov. 11.—Fire broke out in the forward compartment of the submarine L-6 yesterday while the craft was 10 fathoms below the surface on a test run from San Diego to Los Angeles and 15 miles from the latter. Six members of the crew and the commander, Lieut. M. V. Stonestreet, were either seriously burned or overcome by smoke and gas.

The cause of the fire had not been determined last night.

Only a hard fight and a quick race to the surface saved the lives of the 22 men aboard the craft. Several men were overcome fighting the fire before the forward compartment was locked. Then the craft reached the surface and a 15-mile race for the shore and safety was commenced.

Other naval vessels hurried to the rescue as the submarine entered San Pedro harbor, but it continued with unchecked speed until the submarine base had been reached. There sailors with gas helmets went into the hold and carried out the injured from the hold. They were taken to the naval base hospital for treatment.

Mooney and Keeney Released.

Charleston, W. Va., Nov. 11.—C. F. Keeney and Fred Mooney, president and secretary of District No. 17, United Mine Workers of America, were released from the Kanawha county jail here yesterday following a writ issued by the state supreme court requiring Judge Robert Bland of the Logan county circuit court to appear next Tuesday to show cause why he should not be prohibited from proceeding with the trial of the officials in that county on charges growing out of the armed march from Marmet to Mingo.

Freight Rate Cut to Affect Wages of 750,000 Rail Men

New York, Nov. 11.—Reductions in freight rates, which will reflect the cut in the wages of nearly 750,000 employes of railroads north of the Ohio and Potomac rivers and east of the Mississippi, decided upon here yesterday at a meeting of railway executives, will probably be taken up with the Interstate Commerce commission by executives of the lines tomorrow.

Arms Meet Failure Would Be Disaster, Says Grey

London, Nov. 11.—Failure by the Washington armament conference to attain the ends for which it was summoned would be a great disaster, Viscount Grey declares in an article contributed to the Westminster Gazette.

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| 66x80 in. Cotton Blankets in plaid designs— \$2.25 | 72x80 in. warm, heavy Cotton Blankets at— \$4.45 | Extra fine 58x80 in. Woolen plaid Blankets \$9.50 |
| 66x80 in. Cotton Blankets in plaids only— \$2.95 | Good, warm 66x80 in. Indian Blankets are— \$5.85 | 68x80 in. ALL WOOL plaid Blankets, only— \$12.75 |

Comforters—72x84-inch size, filled with new, carded cotton; special Saturday, **\$2.98**

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