

ACT III. THE HAPPY HOME

The scene is the hall of their island home two years later. This sturdy log-house is no mere extension of the hut we have seen in process of erection, but has been built a mile or less to the west of it, on higher ground and near a stream. When the master chose this site, the others thought that all he expected from the stream was a sufficiency of drinking water. They know better now every time they go down to the mill or turn on the electric light.

This hall is the living-room of the house, and walls and roof are of stout logs. Across the joists supporting the roof are laid many home-made implements, such as spades, saws, fishing-rods, and from hooks in the joists are suspended cured foods, of which hams are specially in evidence. Deep recesses half way up the walls contain various provender in barrels and sacks. There are some skins, trophies of the chase, on the floor, which is otherwise bare. The chairs and tables are in some cases hewn out of the solid wood, and in others the result of rough but efficient carpentering. Various pieces of wreckage from the yacht have been turned to novel uses: thus the steering-wheel now hangs from the centre of the roof, with electric lights attached to it encased in bladders. A lifebuoy has become the back of a chair. Two barrels have been halved and turn coyly from each other as a settee.

The farther end of the room is more strictly the kitchen, and is a great recess, which can be shut off from the hall by folding doors. There is a large open fire in it. The chimney is half of one of the boats of the yacht. On the walls of the kitchen proper are many plate-racks, containing shells; there are rows of these of one size and shape, which mark them off as dinner plates or bowls; others are as obviously tureens. They are arranged primly as in a well-conducted kitchen; indeed, neatness and cleanliness are the note struck everywhere, yet the effect of the whole is romantic and barbaric.

The outer door into this hall is a little peculiar on an island. It is covered with skins and is in four leaves, like the swing doors of fashionable restaurants, which allow you to enter without allowing the hot air to escape. During the winter season our castaways have found the contrivance useful, but Crichton's brain was perhaps a little lordly when

he conceived it. Another door leads by a passage to the sleeping-rooms of the house, which are all on the ground-floor, and to Crichton's work-room, where he is at this moment, and whither we should like to follow him, but in a play we may not, as it is out of sight. There is a large window space without a window, which, however, can be shuttered, and through this we have a view of cattle-sheds, fowl-pens, and a field of grain. It is a fine summer evening.

Tweeny is sitting there, very busy plucking the feathers off a bird and dropping them on a sheet placed for that purpose on the floor. She is trilling to herself in the lightness of her heart. We may remember that Tweeny, alone among the women, had dressed wisely for an island when they fled the yacht, and her going-away gown still adheres to her, though in fragments. A score of pieces have been added here and there as necessity compelled, and these have been patched and repatched in incongruous colours; but, when all is said and done, it can still be maintained that Tweeny wears a skirt. She is deservedly proud of her skirt, and sometimes lends it on important occasions when approached in the proper spirit.

Some one outside has been whistling to Tweeny; the guarded whistle which, on a less savage island, is sometimes assumed to be an indication to cook that the constable is willing, if the coast be clear. Tweeny, however, is engrossed, or perhaps she is not in the mood for a follower, so he climbs in at the window undaunted, to take her willy nilly. He is a jolly-looking labouring man, who answers to the name of Daddy, and-- But though that may be his island name, we recognise him at once. He is Lord Loam, settled down to the new conditions, and enjoying life heartily as handy-man about the happy home. He is comfortably attired in skins. He is still stout, but all the flabbiness has dropped from him; gone too is his pomposity; his eye is clear, brown his skin; he could leap a gate.

In his hands he carries an island-made concertina, and such is the exuberance of his spirits that, as he lights on the floor, he bursts into music and song, something about his being a chickety chickety chick chick, and will Tweeny please to tell him whose chickety chick is she. Retribution follows sharp. We hear a whir, as if from insufficiently oiled machinery, and over the passage door appears a placard showing the one word 'Silence.' His lordship stops, and steals to Tweeny on his tiptoes.

LORD LOAM. I thought the Gov. was out.

TWEENY. Well, you see he ain't. And if he were to catch you here idling--

(LORD LOAM pales. He lays aside his musical instrument and hurriedly dons an apron. TWEENY gives him the bird to pluck, and busies herself laying the table for dinner.)

LORD LOAM (softly). What is he doing now?

TWEENY. I think he's working out that plan for laying on hot and cold.

LORD LOAM (proud of his master). And he'll manage it too. The man who could build a blacksmith's forge without tools--

TWEENY (not less proud). He made the tools.

LORD LOAM. Out of half a dozen rusty nails. The saw-mill, Tweeny; the speaking-tube; the electric lighting; and look at the use he has made of the bits of the yacht that were washed ashore. And all in two years. He's a master I'm proud to pluck for.

(He chirps happily at his work, and she regards him curiously.)

TWEENY. Daddy, you're of little use, but you're a bright, cheerful creature to have about the house. (He beams at this commendation.) Do you ever think of old times now? We was a bit different.

LORD LOAM (pausing). Circumstances alter cases. (He resumes his plucking contentedly.)

TWEENY. But, Daddy, if the chance was to come of getting back?

LORD LOAM. I have given up bothering about it.

TWEENY. You bothered that day long ago when we saw a ship passing the island. How we all ran like crazy folk into the water, Daddy, and screamed and held out our arms. (They are both a little agitated.) But it sailed away, and we've never seen another.

LORD LOAM. If we had had the electrical contrivance we have now we could have attracted that ship's notice. (Their eyes rest on a mysterious apparatus that fills a corner of the hall.) A touch on that lever, Tweeny, and in a few moments bonfires would be blazing all round the shore.

TWEENY (backing from the lever as if it might spring at her). It's the most wonderful thing he has done.

LORD LOAM (in a reverie). And then--England--home!

TWEENY (also seeing visions). London of a Saturday night!

LORD LOAM. My lords, in rising once more to address this historic chamber--

TWEENY. There was a little ham and beef shop off the Edgware Road-- (The visions fade; they return to the practical.)

LORD LOAM. Tweeny, do you think I could have an egg to my tea? (At this moment a wiry, athletic figure in skins darkens the window. He is carrying two pails, which are suspended from a pole on his shoulder, and he is ERNEST. We should say that he is ERNEST completely changed if we were of those who hold that people change. As he enters by the window he has heard LORD LOAM's appeal, and is perhaps justifiably indignant.)

ERNEST. What is that about an egg? Why should you have an egg?

LORD LOAM (with hauteur). That is my affair, sir. (With a Parthian shot as he withdraws stiffly from the room.) The Gov. has never put my head in a bucket.

ERNEST (coming to rest on one of his buckets, and speaking with excusable pride. To TWEENY). Nor mine for nearly three months. It was only last week, Tweeny, that he said to me, 'Ernest, the water cure has worked marvels in you, and I question whether I shall require to dip you any more.' (Complacently.) Of course that sort of thing encourages a fellow.

TWEENY (who has now arranged the dinner table to her satisfaction). I will say, Erny, I never seen a young chap more improved.

ERNEST (gratified). Thank you, Tweeny, that's very precious to me.

(She retires to the fire to work the great bellows with her foot, and ERNEST turns to TREHERNE, who has come in looking more like a cowboy than a clergyman. He has a small box in his hand which he tries to conceal.) What have you got there, John?

TREHERNE. Don't tell anybody. It is a little present for the Gov.; a set of razors. One for each day in the week.

ERNEST (opening the box and examining its contents.) Shells! He'll like that. He likes sets of things.

TREHERNE (in a guarded voice). Have you noticed that?

ERNEST. Rather.

TREHERNE. He's becoming a bit magnificent in his ideas.

ERNEST (huskily). John, it sometimes gives me the creeps.

TREHERNE (making sure that TWEENY is out of hearing). What do you think of that brilliant robe he got the girls to make for him.

ERNEST (uncomfortably). I think he looks too regal in it.

TREHERNE. Regal! I sometimes fancy that that's why he's so fond of wearing it. (Practically.) Well, I must take these down to the grindstone and put an edge on them.

ERNEST (button-holing him). I say, John, I want a word with you.

TREHERNE. Well?

ERNEST (become suddenly diffident). Dash it all, you know, you're a clergyman.

TREHERNE. One of the best things the Gov. has done is to insist that none of you forget it.

ERNEST (taking his courage in his hands). Then--would you, John?

TREHERNE. What?

ERNEST (wistfully). Officiate at a marriage ceremony, John?

TREHERNE (slowly). Now, that's really odd.

ERNEST. Odd? Seems to me it's natural. And whatever is natural, John, is right.

TREHERNE. I mean that same question has been put to me today already.

ERNEST (eagerly). By one of the women?

TREHERNE. Oh no; they all put it to me long ago. This was by the Gov. himself.

ERNEST. By Jove! (Admiringly.) I say, John, what an observant beggar he is.

TREHERNE. Ah! You fancy he was thinking of you?

ERNEST. I do not hesitate to affirm, John, that he has seen the love-light in my eyes. You answered--

TREHERNE. I said Yes, I thought it would be my duty to officiate if called upon.

ERNEST. You're a brick.

TREHERNE (still pondering). But I wonder whether he was thinking of you?

ERNEST. Make your mind easy about that.

TREHERNE. Well, my best wishes. Agatha is a very fine girl.

ERNEST. Agatha? What made you think it was Agatha?

TREHERNE. Man alive, you told me all about it soon after we were wrecked.

ERNEST. Pooh! Agatha's all very well in her way, John, but I'm flying at bigger game.

TREHERNE. Ernest, which is it?

ERNEST. Tweeny, of course.

TREHERNE. Tweeny? (Reprovingly.) Ernest, I hope her cooking has nothing to do with this.

ERNEST (with dignity). Her cooking has very little to do with it.

TREHERNE. But does she return your affection.

ERNEST (simply). Yes, John, I believe I may say so. I am unworthy of her, but I think I have touched her heart.

TREHERNE (with a sigh). Some people seem to have all the luck. As you know, Catherine won't look at me.

ERNEST. I'm sorry, John.

TREHERNE. It's my deserts; I'm a second eleven sort of chap. Well, my heartiest good wishes, Ernest.

ERNEST. Thank you, John. How's the little black pig to-day?

TREHERNE (departing). He has begun to eat again.

(After a moment's reflection ERNEST calls to TWEENY.)

ERNEST. Are you very busy, Tweeny?

TWEENY (coming to him good-naturedly). There's always work to do; but if you want me, Ernest--

ERNEST. There's something I should like to say to you if you could spare me a moment.

TWEENY. Willingly. What is it?

ERNEST. What an ass I used to be, Tweeny.

TWEENY (tolerantly). Oh, let bygones be bygones.

ERNEST (sincerely, and at his very best). I'm no great shakes even now. But listen to this, Tweeny; I have known many women, but until I knew you I never knew any woman.

TWEENY (to whose uneducated ears this sounds dangerously like an epigram). Take care--the bucket.

ERNEST (hurriedly). I didn't mean it in that way. (He goes chivalrously on his knees.) Ah, Tweeny, I don't undervalue the bucket, but what I want to say now is that the sweet refinement of a dear girl has done more for me than any bucket could do.

TWEENY (with large eyes). Are you offering to walk out with me, Erny?

ERNEST (passionately). More than that. I want to build a little house for you--in the sunny glade down by Porcupine Creek. I want to make chairs for you and tables; and knives and forks, and a sideboard for you.

TWEENY (who is fond of language). I like to hear you. (Eyeing him.) Would there be any one in the house except myself, Ernest?

ERNEST (humbly). Not often; but just occasionally there would be your adoring husband.

TWEENY (decisively). It won't do, Ernest.

ERNEST (pleading). It isn't as if I should be much there.

TWEENY. I know, I know; but I don't love you, Ernest. I'm that sorry.

ERNEST (putting his case cleverly). Twice a week I should be away altogether--at the dam. On the other days you would never see me from breakfast time to supper. (With the self-abnegation of the true lover.) If you like I'll even go fishing on Sundays.

TWEENY. It's no use, Erny.

ERNEST (rising manfully). Thank you, Tweeny; it can't be helped. (Then he remembers.) Tweeny, we shall be disappointing the Gov.

TWEENY (with a sinking). What's that?

ERNEST. He wanted us to marry.

TWEENY (blankly). You and me? the Gov.! (Her head droops woefully. From without is heard the whistling of a happier spirit, and TWEENY draws herself up fiercely.) That's her; that's the thing what has stole his heart from me. (A stalwart youth appears at the window, so handsome and tingling with vitality that, glad to depose CRICHTON, we cry thankfully, 'The Hero at last.' But it is not the hero; it is the heroine. This splendid boy, clad in skins, is what nature has done for LADY MARY. She carries bow and arrows and a blow-pipe, and over her shoulder is a fat buck, which she drops with a cry of triumph. Forgetting to enter demurely, she leaps through the window.) (Sourly.) Drat you, Polly, why don't you wipe your feet?

LADY MARY (good-naturedly). Come, Tweeny, be nice to me. It's a splendid buck. (But TWEENY shakes her off, and retires to the kitchen fire.)

ERNEST. Where did you get it?

LADY MARY (gaily). I sighted a herd near Penguin's Creek, but had to creep round Silver Lake to get to windward of them. However, they spotted me and then the fun began. There was nothing for it but to try

and run them down, so I singled out a fat buck and away we went down the shore of the lake, up the valley of rolling stones; he doubled into Brawling River and took to the water, but I swam after him; the river is only half a mile broad there, but it runs strong. He went spinning down the rapids, down I went in pursuit; he clambered ashore, I clambered ashore; away we tore helter-skelter up the hill and down again. I lost him in the marshes, got on his track again near Bread Fruit Wood, and brought him down with an arrow in Firefly Grove.

TWEENY (staring at her). Aren't you tired?

LADY MARY. Tired! It was gorgeous. (She runs up a ladder and deposits her weapons on the joists. She is whistling again.)

TWEENY (snapping). I can't abide a woman whistling.

LADY MARY (indifferently). I like it.

TWEENY (stamping her foot). Drop it, Polly, I tell you.

LADY MARY (stung). I won't. I'm as good as you are. (They are facing each other defiantly.)

ERNEST (shocked). Is this necessary? Think how it would pain him. (LADY MARY's eyes take a new expression. We see them soft for the first time.)

LADY MARY (contritely). Tweeny, I beg your pardon. If my whistling annoys you, I shall try to cure myself of it. (Instead of calming TWEENY, this floods her face in tears.) Why, how can that hurt you, Tweeny dear?

TWEENY. Because I can't make you lose your temper.

LADY MARY (divinely). Indeed, I often do. Would that I were nicer to everybody.

TWEENY. There you are again. (Wistfully.) What makes you want to be so nice, Polly?

LADY MARY (with fervour). Only thankfulness, Tweeny. (She exults.) It is such fun to be alive. (So also seem to think CATHERINE and AGATHA, who bounce in with fishing-rods and creel. They, too, are in manly attire.)

CATHERINE. We've got some ripping fish for the Gov.'s dinner. Are we in time? We ran all the way.

TWEENY (tartly). You'll please to cook them yourself, Kitty, and look sharp about it. (She retires to her hearth, where AGATHA follows her.)

AGATHA (yearning). Has the Gov. decided who is to wait upon him to-day?

CATHERINE (who is cleaning her fish). It's my turn.

AGATHA (hotly). I don't see that.

TWEENY (with bitterness). It's to be neither of you, Aggy; he wants Polly again.

(LADY MARY is unable to resist a joyous whistle.)

AGATHA (jealously). Polly, you toad. (But they cannot make LADY MARY angry.)

TWEENY (storming). How dare you look so happy?

LADY MARY (willing to embrace her). I wish, Tweeny, there was anything I could do to make you happy also.

TWEENY. Me! Oh, I'm happy. (She remembers ERNEST, whom it is easy to forget on an island.) I've just had a proposal, I tell you.

(LADY MARY is shaken at last, and her sisters with her.)

AGATHA. A proposal?

CATHERINE (going white). Not--not--(She dare not say his name.)

ERNEST (with singular modesty). You needn't be alarmed; it's only me.

LADY MARY (relieved). Oh, you!

AGATHA (happy again). Ernest, you dear, I got such a shock.

CATHERINE. It was only Ernest. (Showing him her fish in thankfulness.) They are beautifully fresh; come and help me to cook them.

ERNEST (with simple dignity). Do you mind if I don't cook fish to-night? (She does not mind in the least. They have all forgotten him. A lark is singing in three hearts.) I think you might all be a little sorry for a chap.

(But they are not even sorry, and he addresses AGATHA in these winged words:) I'm particularly disappointed in you, Aggy; seeing that I was half engaged to you, I think you might have had the good feeling to be a little more hurt.

AGATHA. Oh, bother.

ERNEST (summing up the situation in so far as it affects himself). I shall now go and lie down for a bit. (He retires coldly but unregretted. LADY MARY approaches TWEENY with her most insinuating smile.)

LADY MARY. Tweeny, as the Gov. has chosen me to wait on him, please may I have the loan of it again? (The reference made with such charming delicacy is evidently to TWEENY's skirt.)

TWEENY (doggedly). No, you mayn't.

AGATHA (supporting TWEENY). Don't you give it to her.

LADY MARY (still trying sweet persuasion). You know quite well that he prefers to be waited on in a skirt.

TWEENY. I don't care. Get one for yourself.

LADY MARY. It is the only one on the island.

TWEENY. And it's mine.

LADY MARY (an aristocrat after all). Tweeny, give me that skirt directly.

CATHERINE. Don't.

TWEENY. I won't.

LADY MARY (clearing for action). I shall make you.

TWEENY. I should like to see you try.

(An unseemly fracas appears to be inevitable, but something happens. The whir is again heard, and the notice is displayed 'Dogs delight to bark and bite.' Its effect is instantaneous and cheering. The ladies look at each other guiltily and immediately proceed on tiptoe to their duties. These are all concerned with the master's dinner. CATHERINE attends to his fish. AGATHA fills a quaint toast-rack and brings the menu, which is written on a shell. LADY MARY twists a wreath of green leaves around her head,

and places a flower beside the master's plate. TWEENY signs that all is ready, and she and the younger sisters retire into the kitchen, drawing the screen that separates it from the rest of the room. LADY MARY beats a tom-tom, which is the dinner bell. She then gently works a punkah, which we have not hitherto observed, and stands at attention. No doubt she is in hopes that the Gov. will enter into conversation with her, but she is too good a parlour-maid to let her hopes appear in her face. We may watch her manner with complete approval. There is not one of us who would not give her £26 a year.

The master comes in quietly, a book in his hand, still the only book on the island, for he has not thought it worth while to build a printing-press. His dress is not noticeably different from that of the others, the skins are similar, but perhaps these are a trifle more carefully cut or he carries them better. One sees somehow that he has changed for his evening meal. There is an odd suggestion of a dinner jacket about his doeskin coat. It is, perhaps, too grave a face for a man of thirty-two, as if he were over much immersed in affairs, yet there is a sunny smile left to lighten it at times and bring back its youth; perhaps too intellectual a face to pass as strictly handsome, not sufficiently suggestive of oats. His tall figure is very straight, slight rather than thick-set, but nobly muscular. His big hands, firm and hard with labour though they be, are finely shaped--note the fingers so much more tapered, the nails better tended than those of his domestics; they are one of many indications that he is of a superior breed. Such signs, as has often been pointed out, are infallible. A romantic figure, too. One can easily see why the women-folks of this strong man's house both adore and fear him.

He does not seem to notice who is waiting on him to-night, but inclines his head slightly to whoever it is, as she takes her place at the back of his chair. LADY MARY respectfully places the menu-shell before him, and he glances at it.)

CRICHTON. Clear, please.

(LADY MARY knocks on the screen, and a serving hutch in it opens, through which TWEENY offers two soup plates. LADY MARY selects the clear, and the aperture is closed. She works the punkah while the master partakes of the soup.)

CRICHTON (who always gives praise where it is due). An excellent soup, Polly, but still a trifle too rich.

LADY MARY. Thank you.

(The next course is the fish, and while it is being passed through the hutch we have a glimpse of three jealous women.)

LADY MARY'S movements are so deft and noiseless that any observant spectator can see that she was born to wait at table.)

CRICHTON (unbending as he eats). Polly, you are a very smart girl.

LADY MARY (bridling, but naturally gratified). La!

CRICHTON (smiling). And I'm not the first you've heard it from, I'll swear.

LADY MARY (wriggling). Oh God!

CRICHTON. Got any followers on the island, Polly?

LADY MARY (tossing her head). Certainly not.

CRICHTON. I thought that perhaps John or Ernest--

LADY MARY (tilting her nose). I don't say that it's for want of asking.

CRICHTON (emphatically). I'm sure it isn't. (Perhaps he thinks he has gone too far.) You may clear.

(Flushed with pleasure, she puts before him a bird and vegetables, sees that his beaker is fitted with wine, and returns to the punkah. She would love to continue their conversation, but it is for him to decide. For a time he seems to have forgotten her.)

CRICHTON. Did you lose any arrows to-day?

LADY MARY. Only one in Firefly Grove.

CRICHTON. You were as far as that? How did you get across the Black Gorge?

LADY MARY. I went across on the rope.

CRICHTON. Hand over hand?

LADY MARY (swelling at the implied praise). I wasn't in the least dizzy.

CRICHTON (moved). You brave girl! (He sits back in his chair a little agitated.) But never do that again.

LADY MARY (pouting). It is such fun, Gov.

CRICHTON (decisively). I forbid it.

LADY MARY (the little rebel). I shall.

CRICHTON (surprised). Polly! (He signs to her sharply to step forward, but for a moment she holds back petulantly, and even when she does come it is less obediently than like a naughty, sulky child. Nevertheless, with the forbearance that is characteristic of the man, he addresses her with grave gentleness rather than severely.) You must do as I tell you, you know.

LADY MARY (strangely passionate). I shan't.

CRICHTON (smiling at her fury). We shall see. Frown at me, Polly; there, you do it at once. Clench your little fists, stamp your feet, bite your ribbons--(A student of women, or at least of this woman, he knows that she is about to do those things, and thus she seems to do them to order. LADY MARY screws up her face like a baby and cries. He is immediately kind.) You child of nature; was it cruel of me to wish to save you from harm?

LADY MARY (drying her eyes). I'm an ungracious wretch. Oh God, I don't try half hard enough to please you. I'm even wearing--(she looks down sadly)--when I know you prefer it.

CRICHTON (thoughtfully). I admit I do prefer it. Perhaps I am a little old-fashioned in these matters. (Her tears again threaten.) Ah, don't, Polly; that's nothing.

LADY MARY. If I could only please you, Gov.

CRICHTON (slowly). You do please me, child, very much--(he half rises)--very much indeed. (If he meant to say more he checks himself. He looks at his plate.) No more, thank you. (The simple island meal is ended, save for the walnuts and the wine, and CRICHTON is too busy a man to linger long over them. But he is a stickler for etiquette, and the table is cleared charmingly, though with dispatch, before they are placed before him. LADY MARY is an artist with the crumb-brush, and there are few arts more delightful to watch. Dusk has come sharply, and she turns on the electric light. It awakens CRICHTON from a reverie in which he has been regarding her.)

CRICHTON. Polly, there is only one thing about you that I don't quite like. (She looks up, making a moue, if that can be said of one who so well knows her place. He explains.) That action of the hands.

LADY MARY. What do I do?

CRICHTON. So--like one washing them. I have noticed that the others tend to do it also. It seems odd.

LADY MARY (archly). Oh Gov., have you forgotten?

CRICHTON. What?

LADY MARY. That once upon a time a certain other person did that.

CRICHTON (groping). You mean myself? (She nods, and he shudders.) Horrible!

LADY MARY (afraid she has hurt him). You haven't for a very long time. Perhaps it is natural to servants.

CRICHTON. That must be it. (He rises.) Polly! (She looks up expectantly, but he only sighs and turns away.)

LADY MARY (gently). You sighed, Gov.

CRICHTON. Did I? I was thinking. (He paces the room and then turns to her agitatedly, yet with control over his agitation. There is some mournfulness in his voice.) I have always tried to do the right thing on this island. Above all, Polly, I want to do the right thing by you.

LADY MARY (with shining eyes). How we all trust you. That is your reward, Gov.

CRICHTON (who is having a fight with himself). And now I want a greater reward. Is it fair to you? Am I playing the game? Bill Crichton would like always to play the game. If we were in England--(He pauses so long that she breaks in softly.)

LADY MARY. We know now that we shall never see England again.

CRICHTON. I am thinking of two people whom neither of us has seen for a long time--Lady Mary Lasenby, and one Crichton, a butler. (He says the last word bravely, a word he once loved, though it is the most horrible of all words to him now.)

LADY MARY. That cold, haughty, insolent girl. Gov., look around you and forget them both.

CRICHTON. I had nigh forgotten them. He has had a chance, Polly--that butler--in these two years of becoming a man, and he has tried to take it. There have been many failures, but there has been some success, and with it I have let the past drop off me, and turned my back on it. That butler seems a far-away figure to me now, and not myself. I hail him, but we scarce know each other. If I am to bring him back it can only be done by force, for in my soul he is now abhorrent to me. But if I thought it best for you I'd haul him back; I swear as an honest man, I would bring him back with all his obsequious ways and deferential airs, and let you see the man you call your Gov. melt for ever into him who was your servant.

LADY MARY (shivering). You hurt me. You say these things, but you say them like a king. To me it is the past that was not real.

CRICHTON (too grandly). A king! I sometimes feel--(For a moment the yellow light gleams in his green eyes. We remember suddenly what TREHERNE and ERNEST said about his regal look. He checks himself.) I say it harshly, it is so hard to say, and all the time there is another voice within me crying--(He stops.)

LADY MARY (trembling but not afraid). If it is the voice of nature--

CRICHTON (strongly). I know it to be the voice of nature.

LADY MARY (in a whisper). Then, if you want to say it very much, Gov., please say it to Polly Lasenby.

CRICHTON (again in the grip of an idea). A king! Polly, some people hold that the soul but leaves one human tenement for another, and so lives on through all the ages. I have occasionally thought of late that, in some past existence, I may have been a king. It has all come to me so naturally, not as if I had had to work it out, but-as-if-I-remembered. 'Or ever the knightly years were gone, With the old world to the grave, I was a king in Babylon, And you were a Christian slave.' It may have been; you hear me, it may have been.

LADY MARY (who is as one fascinated). It may have been.

CRICHTON. I am lord over all. They are but hewers of wood and drawers of water for me. These shores are mine. Why should I hesitate; I have no longer any doubt. I do believe I am doing the right thing. Dear Polly, I have grown to love you; are you afraid to mate with me? (She rocks her arms; no words will come from her.) 'I was a king in Babylon, And you were a Christian slave.'

LADY MARY (bewitched). You are the most wonderful man I have ever known, and I am not afraid. (He takes her to him reverently. Presently he is seated, and she is at his feet looking up adoringly in his face. As the tension relaxes she speaks with a smile.) I want you to tell me--every woman likes to know--when was the first time you thought me nicer than the others?

CRICHTON (who, like all big men, is simple). I think a year ago. We were chasing goats on the Big Slopes, and you out-distanced us all; you were the first of our party to run a goat down; I was proud of you that day.

LADY MARY (blushing with pleasure). Oh Gov., I only did it to please you. Everything I have done has been out of the desire to please you. (Suddenly anxious.) If I thought that in taking a wife from among us you were imperilling your dignity--

CRICHTON (perhaps a little masterful). Have no fear of that, dear. I have thought it all out. The wife, Polly, always takes the same position as the husband.

LADY MARY. But I am so unworthy. It was sufficient to me that I should be allowed to wait on you at that table.

CRICHTON. You shall wait on me no longer. At whatever table I sit, Polly, you shall soon sit there also. (Boyishly.) Come, let us try what it will be like.

LADY MARY. As your servant at your feet.

CRICHTON. No, as my consort by my side.

(They are sitting thus when the hatch is again opened and coffee offered. But LADY MARY is no longer there to receive it. Her sisters peep through in consternation. In vain they rattle the cup and saucer. AGATHA brings the coffee to CRICHTON.)

CRICHTON (forgetting for the moment that it is not a month hence). Help your mistress first, girl. (Three women are bereft of speech, but he does not notice it. He addresses CATHERINE vaguely.) Are you a good girl, Kitty?

CATHERINE (when she finds her tongue). I try to be, Gov.

CRICHTON (still more vaguely). That's right. (He takes command of himself again, and signs to them to sit down. ERNEST comes in cheerily, but finding CRICHTON here is suddenly weak. He subsides on a chair, wondering what has happened.)

CRICHTON (surveying him). Ernest. (ERNEST rises.) You are becoming a little slovenly in your dress, Ernest; I don't like it.

ERNEST (respectfully). Thank you. (ERNEST sits again. DADDY and TREHERNE arrive.)

CRICHTON. Daddy, I want you.

LORD LOAM (with a sinking). Is it because I forgot to clean out the dam?

CRICHTON (encouragingly). No, no. (He pours some wine into a goblet.) A glass of wine with you, Daddy.

LORD LOAM (hastily). Your health, Gov. (He is about to drink, but the master checks him.)

CRICHTON. And hers. Daddy, this lady has done me the honour to promise to be my wife.

LORD LOAM (astounded). Polly!

CRICHTON (a little perturbed). I ought first to have asked your consent. I deeply regret--but nature; may I hope I have your approval?

LORD LOAM. May you, Gov.? (Delighted.) Rather! Polly! (He puts his proud arms round her.)

TREHERNE. We all congratulate you, Gov., most heartily.

ERNEST. Long life to you both, sir.

(There is much shaking of hands, all of which is sincere.)

TREHERNE. When will it be, Gov.?

CRICHTON (after turning to LADY MARY, who whispers to him). As soon as the bridal skirt can be prepared. (His manner has been most indulgent, and without the slightest suggestion of patronage. But he knows it is best for all that he should keep his place, and that his presence hampers them.) My friends, I thank you for your good wishes, I thank you all. And now, perhaps you would like me to leave you to yourselves. Be joyous. Let there be song and dance to-night. Polly, I shall take my coffee in the parlour--you understand.

(He retires with pleasant dignity. Immediately there is a rush of two girls at LADY MARY.)

LADY MARY. Oh, oh! Father, they are pinching me.

LORD LOAM (taking her under his protection). Agatha, Catherine, never presume to pinch your sister again. On the other hand, she may pinch you henceforth as much as ever she chooses.

(In the meantime TWEENY is weeping softly, and the two are not above using her as a weapon.)

CATHERINE. Poor Tweeny, it's a shame.

AGATHA. After he had almost promised you.

TWEENY (loyally turning on them). No, he never did. He was always honourable as could be. 'Twas me as was too vulgar. Don't you dare say a word agin that man.

ERNEST (to LORD LOAM). You'll get a lot of tit-bits out of this, Daddy.

LORD LOAM. That's what I was thinking.

ERNEST (plunged in thought). I dare say I shall have to clean out the dam now.

LORD LOAM (heartlessly). I dare say. (His gay old heart makes him again proclaim that he is a chickety chick. He seizes the concertina.)

TREHERNE (eagerly). That's the proper spirit. (He puts his arm round CATHERINE, and in another moment they are all dancing to Daddy's music. Never were people happier on an island. A moment's pause is presently created by the return of CRICHTON, wearing the wonderful robe of which we have already had dark mention. Never has he looked

more regal, never perhaps felt so regal. We need not grudge him the one foible of his rule, for it is all coming to an end.)

CRICHTON (graciously, seeing them hesitate). No, no; I am delighted to see you all so happy. Go on.

TREHERNE. We don't like to before you, Gov.

CRICHTON (his last order). It is my wish.

(The merrymaking is resumed, and soon CRICHTON himself joins in the dance. It is when the fun is at its fastest and most furious that all stop abruptly as if turned to stone. They have heard the boom of a gun. Presently they are alive again. ERNEST leaps to the window.)

TREHERNE (huskily). It was a ship's gun. (They turn to CRICHTON for confirmation; even in that hour they turn to CRICHTON.) Gov.?

CRICHTON. Yes.

(In another moment LADY MARY and LORD LOAM are alone.)

LADY MARY (seeing that her father is unconcerned). Father, you heard.

LORD LOAM (placidly). Yes, my child.

LADY MARY (alarmed by his unnatural calmness). But it was a gun, father.

LORD LOAM (looking an old man now, and shuddering a little). Yes--a gun--I have often heard it. It's only a dream, you know; why don't we go on dancing?

(She takes his hands, which have gone cold.)

LADY MARY. Father. Don't you see, they have all rushed down to the beach? Come.

LORD LOAM. Rushed down to the beach; yes, always that--I often dream it.

LADY MARY. Come, father, come.

LORD LOAM. Only a dream, my poor girl.

(CRICHTON returns. He is pale but firm.)

CRICHTON. We can see lights within a mile of the shore--a great ship.

LORD LOAM. A ship--always a ship.

LADY MARY. Father, this is no dream.

LORD LOAM (looking timidly at CRICHTON). It's a dream, isn't it? There's no ship?

CRICHTON (soothing him with a touch). You are awake, Daddy, and there is a ship.

LORD LOAM (clutching him). You are not deceiving me?

CRICHTON. It is the truth.

LORD LOAM (reeling). True?--a ship--at last!

(He goes after the others pitifully.)

CRICHTON (quietly). There is a small boat between it and the island; they must have sent it ashore for water.

LADY MART. Coming in?

CRICHTON. No. That gun must have been a signal to recall it. It is going back. They can't hear our cries.

LADY MARY (pressing her temples). Going away. So near--so near. (Almost to herself.) I think I'm glad.

CRICHTON (cheerily). Have no fear. I shall bring them back.

(He goes towards the table on which is the electrical apparatus.)

LADY MARY (standing on guard as it were between him and the table). What are you going to do?

CRICHTON. To fire the beacons.

LADY MARY. Stop! (She faces him.) Don't you see what it means?

CRICHTON (firmly). It means that our life on the island has come to a natural end.

LADY MARY (husky). Gov., let the ship go--

CRICHTON. The old man--you saw what it means to him.

LADY MARY. But I am afraid.

CRICHTON (adoringly). Dear Polly.

LADY MARY. Gov., let the ship go.

CRICHTON (she clings to him, but though it is his death sentence he loosens her hold). Bill Crichton has got to play the game. (He pulls the levers. Soon through the window one of the beacons is seen flaring red. There is a long pause. Shouting is heard. ERNEST is the first to arrive.)

ERNEST. Polly, Gov., the boat has turned back. They are English sailors; they have landed! We are rescued, I tell you, rescued!

LADY MARY (wanly). Is it anything to make so great a to-do about?

ERNEST (staring). Eh?

LADY MARY. Have we not been happy here?

ERNEST. Happy? Lord, yes.

LADY MARY (catching hold of his sleeve). Ernest, we must never forget all that the Gov. has done for us.

ERNEST (stoutly). Forget it? The man who could forget it would be a selfish wretch and a--But I say, this makes a difference!

LADY MARY (quickly). No, it doesn't.

ERNEST (his mind tottering). A mighty difference!

(The others come running in, some weeping with joy, others boisterous. We see blue-jackets gazing through the window at the curious scene. LORD LOAM comes accompanied by a naval officer, whom he is continually shaking by the hand.)

LORD LOAM. And here, sir, is our little home. Let me thank you in the name of us all, again and again and again.

OFFICER. Very proud, my lord. It is indeed an honour to have been able to assist so distinguished a gentleman as Lord Loam.

LORD LOAM. A glorious, glorious day. I shall show you our other room.
Come, my pets. Come, Crichton.

(He has not meant to be cruel. He does not know he has said it. It is the old life that has come back to him. They all go. All leave CRICHTON except LADY MARY.)

LADY MARY (stretching out her arms to him). Dear Gov., I will never give you up.

(There is a salt smile on his face as he shakes his head to her. He lets the cloak slip to the ground. She will not take this for an answer; again her arms go out to him. Then comes the great renunciation. By an effort of will he ceases to be an erect figure; he has the humble bearing of a servant. His hands come together as if he were washing them.)

CRICHTON (it is the speech of his life). My lady.

(She goes away. There is none to salute him now, unless we do it.)

End of Act III.