

## CHAPTER V

AFTER Nealman and I had each smoked a cigarette, I thought of a little plan that might increase his guest's interest in the week's shoot and hunt. He had been right when he said that even incredible legends, believed by no one, still add flavor to the country manor. I didn't see why we shouldn't turn them into account.

"I've got an idea," I told him, "and it all depends whether or not you've already sent the invitations to your guests."

"No, I haven't—just haven't got around to it," he answered. "All I was going to do was to write to about nine or ten of my men friends. I don't suppose all of them can come."

"Good. I thought it might be interesting if we worked that legend into the invitation—just to add a little spice to the fishing and hunting. It might serve to waken a little extra interest in your party. Of course—it includes poking fun at the ferocious Jason and his treasure."

"They'll have a lot more fun poked at them before we're done. As I told you—only the colored people take them seriously at all."

I took out my fountain pen, found a scrap of paper, and drew something like this:

GRAND TREASURE HUNT  
 You are hereby invited to rally round at  
**KASTLE KRAGS**  
 Sept. 6-12: search for  
**SPANISH GOLD**



P.S. Bring rods and guns. turkey,  
quail, deer, sea-fish. All That makes  
the sportsman's heart be glad.

R.S.V.P.



As my only drawing experience consisted in portraying specimens, it had no artistic pretensions whatever.

He seemed pleased, adopted the plan in an instant, then began to write down the names of his guests so that I could prepare an invitation for each. Most of them, I observed, lived in great cities to the North, New York and Boston particularly, and one or two of the men were more or less nationally known. The first half dozen names came easy. Then he paused, frowning.

"I wish I knew what to do about this bird," he muttered, as much to himself as to me. "Kill-dare, I don't suppose you've ever heard of him—Major Kenneth Dell?"

I shook my head. "Not that I remember."

"Well, I haven't either—yet I suppose he's a good sportsman. In the last few weeks he's got close to my best friend, Bill Van Hope, and Bill asked me to ask him down for this shoot. Says he's a distinguished man, the best of fellows, and is simply wild to try Floridan game. Oh, I'll put him down. If Bill recommends him he must be the goods."

He completed the list in a moment, then his duties calling him elsewhere, he left me in the study to prepare the invitations. And the hour turned out fortunately for me, after all. Thinking that the room was empty, Edith Nealman came back to her desk.



All the gold in Jason's chest could not have bought a more lovely picture than she made, standing framed in the doorway. She was dressed in a spotless cotton middy-suit, and the red scarf at her throat brought out to perfection the light in her eyes and the high color in her cheeks. Then she came in and inspected the invitations.

There was no occasion for me to leave at once. We talked a while, on everything under the sun, and every minute something that was like delight kept growing within me. She'd been up against the world, this girl that chattered so gaily in the big, easy office-chair. She had known poverty, a veritable struggle for existence; yet they hadn't hardened her in the least. No one I had ever met had possessed a sweeter, truer outlook, an unfeigned friendliness and comradeship for every decent thing that lived. Maybe you'd call it a childish simplicity, but I didn't stop to consider what it was. I only knew that she was the prettiest and the sweetest girl I'd ever seen, and I was going to spend every moment possible in her presence.

Oh, but I loved to hear her laugh! I kept my brain busy thinking up things to say to her, that might waken that rippling sound of silver bells! I liked to see her eyes grow serious, and her lips half-pout as some delightful, fanciful

thought played hide-and-seek in her mind. She had imagination, this niece of Grover Nealman. Perhaps, after all, it was the secret of her charm. I didn't doubt for a moment but that she read romantic novels by the score, but I, for one, wouldn't hold the fact against her.

We talked over the legend of Jason's chest; and I was a little surprised at her devoted interest in it. Evidently the savage tale had gone straight home to her imagination. Whether she put the least credence in it I couldn't tell.

It came about, in the twilight hour, that we walked together down to the craggy shore of the lagoon. Then we stood and watched the light dying on the blue-green water.

Once more the tide was rolling in. The waves beat with a startling fury over and against the rock wall, and in the half-light the white stones looked like the foam-covered fangs of a mighty sea-monster, raging at our intrusion. The water swept through the little crevices in the wall, and the cool spray, refreshing after the tropic day, swept against our faces.

The gray sand stretched down to the desolate sea. A plover uttered his disconsolate, wailing cry far out to sea. Some dark heron or bittern rose croaking from beside the lagoon, then flapped awkwardly away. I felt the girl's hand on my arm as she drew closer to my side.

A worthy place—this manor house of Nealan. Vague thoughts, not quite in keeping with the ordered dimensions of life, had hold of my mind. Presently the girl's grip tightened, and she pointed toward the lagoon.

I saw her face before I followed her gesture. I didn't get the idea that she was frightened. Rather she was smiling, quietly, and her eyes glistened.

Seventy yards out, and perhaps fifteen yards back from the Bridge, great bubbles were bursting upward through the blue-green troubled waters. Some mysterious action of the currents, stirred by the tides, was the unquestioned cause; yet both of us were stirred by the same fancy. It was as if some great, air-breathing sea-monster was exhaling beneath the waves.