Holman Day

Where Your Treasure Is

Holman Day

Where Your Treasure Is

Being the Personal Narrative of Ross Sidney, Diver

Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4064066135591

Table of Contents

WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS

Table of Contents

I—BEING THE STRUGGLE OF AN AMATEUR AUTHOR TO GET A FAIR START

Table of Contents

SPEAKING of money—and it’s a mighty popular topic—the investment of the first twenty-five cents I ever earned, all at a crack, ought to have directed my feet, my thoughts, and my future along the straight and narrow way. Ten minutes after I had galloped gleefully home with that quarter-dollar from Judge Kingsley’s hay-field, my good mother led me down to Old Maid Branscombe’s little book-store and obliged me to buy a catechism.

I earned that money by hauling a drag-rake for a whole day around behind a hay-cart, barefoot and kicking against the vicious stubbles of the shaven field. I honestly felt that I did not deserve the extra penance of the catechism.

However, that first day's work gave me my earliest respect for money—earned money. And I also remember that Judge Kingsley, when he paid me, sniffed and said I hadn't done enough to earn twenty-five cents.

I hated to walk up to him and ask for my pay, because Celene Kingsley was within hearing; she had come down to the field to fetch him home in her pony-chaise. That's right! You've guessed it! I'll waste no words. It was only another of the old familiar cases. Barefooted, folks poor, keeping my face toward her, as a sunflower fronts the sun (though the sunflower has other reasons than hiding patches), I was in the shamed, secret, hopeless, heartaching agonies of a fifteen-year-old passion. Of course, I don't mean that I had loved her for all that time—I'm giving my age and hers.

Yes, I hated to walk up. And the judge gave me the quarter only because he did not have any smaller change.

And really, for the times, it was considerable of a coin for a single juvenile job.

The services of youngsters in those days in Levant were paid for on a narrower scale—ten cents for lawns and a nickel for shoveling snow, and so on. And tin-peddlers were mighty stingy in their dickerings for old rubbers and junk. To get rags one had to steal 'em—our folks made rugs and guarded old remnants carefully.

So much for my first financial adventure of real moment—for the biggest coin I had ever clutched; and right now I lay down my pen for a moment and spread out two human paws which have juggled three million dollars' worth of gold ingots as carelessly as one scruffles jackstraws. That was maverick treasure. But there's a big difference between

earned money and maverick money. If you don’t know what maverick means I’ll save you the trouble of looking the word up in the dictionary. Once on a time, in Texas, old Sam Maverick wouldn’t brand his cattle. Therefore, a maverick was a cow or steer unbranded. And to-day it means any kind of property at large which a bold man or a dishonest man may grab if he can beat other thieves to it.

I had an early taste of maverick money, and the taste was so sweet that I never have lost my hankering for more.

In the fall of that “year of the catechism” the line gale blew down the chimney which had stood after the old Pratt house was burned. I was there before the dust settled, for all the boys knew that there were wrought-iron clamps high up in the bricks. But I left the clamps to the next comers and picked up a dented tin box, rusty and dusty and soot-blackened; I shook it; it rattled and I ran away into the woods. When I had knocked the box open and looked in and spied coins I had the heart-thrilling conviction that money worries were over for me in this life. My first thought was that I would marry Celene Kingsley and settle down and live happy ever after. If there had been in the box what I thought at first there was, I could wipe my pen and close my story.

I dove both hands into the box and brought them up brimming—coins scattering and clattering back over my trembling fingers. They were big coins—and I had read much about the days of the bold pirates.

“Pieces of eight!” I whispered.

But they were not. When I had winked the mist out of my eyes I found that they were old-fashioned coppers—bung-downs they used to be called. Mixed in with them were a

few copper tokens, a Pine Tree shilling, a sprinkling of Speed The Plow cents, and the only coin of any account at all was a Mexican dollar with a hole in it.

It wasn’t in my nature to bury that treasure. I knew it was pretty worthless junk, but I had a hankering to carry it about with me, to feel its drag in my pockets, to reach in and chink it when no one could hear. I walked around weighted with it as afterward I have been weighted with the leaden chunks of my diver’s dress. As early as that in my life I found that money was a burden as well as a vexation. I didn’t dare to frisk and frolic with the boys at school; I was not exploiting my new wealth; I had grounds for caution because there were plenty of Pratts left in Levant. At home I moved about so quietly that my folks thought, I reckon, that I was entering an early decline. My mother used to look at my tongue quite often and made me drink hardhack tea.

But there is one impulse in the male animal which is not easily controlled by prudence; it’s that cursed itch to make a show in front of the female of the species—in front of the special one, the selected one, the beloved one. Some sort of a jimcrack-peddler came into the school-yard one noon, and Celene Kingsley, daughter of a plutocrat, tendered a big, shiny silver dollar and the man could not change it for her. I walked up, trembling with both pride and panic, and said, trying my best to act the part of a matter-of-fact bank on two legs, “Let me handle it for you!” It was the first time I had ever spoken to her, and my voice was only a weak squawk.

When she turned to me and opened her big, blue eyes, I was nigh to running away.

The boys and girls came crowding around, and I couldn’t blame them for showing interest; the sight of a Levant Sidney with money on him was a new one in town.

I had separated from the coppers the aristocrats of my hoard, the Pine Tree shilling and the Mexican dollar, by wrapping them in a wisp of paper. I brought them out first.

“I don’t know exactly what they are worth in real money,” I told her. “But you can have ’em at half price.”

She had been considerably surprised before, but now she was plain dumfounded. That system of changing a dollar was brand new.

Then I dredged a trousers pocket and produced a handful of the bung-down coppers. I began to count them down on a corner of the school-house steps.

“Somebody get a wheelbarrow,” advised one of the boys. “That’s the only way she’ll ever tug-a-lug her change home.”

“Really, you needn’t bother,” she said, stammering a little. “No, don’t trouble yourself. I have changed my mind about buying anything.”

They all laughed.

“That isn’t money,” said the jimcrack man. “I’d never take that stuff for my goods.”

A girl ran up and grabbed into the coppers I had been, heaping on the stone. She was a Pratt.

“Ross Sidney, you stole that money,” she squealed. “It was in my granny’s notion-box. We couldn’t find it after she died. You stole it!”

“I didn’t steal it—I found it,” I told her. But all the courage had gone out of me.

“You ain’t the first thief to lie about your stealings.”

“But I did find it—I found it after the chimney blew down.”

“You knew it was ours. You didn’t bring it to us—that’s stealing.”

“It might have been put there before—”

“It was my granny’s money. Don’t you suppose I know? She saved old coppers.” She spread down her handkerchief and began to pile the coins upon it.

There did not seem to be any room for argument. In my shame I fell to wondering how I had ever convinced myself that this money was treasure-trove. I dug down and gave her the rest of it. Instead of proudly showing myself a person of means before Celene Kingsley I was. barely escaping the suspicion of being a thief.

“If it belongs to the Pratts you’re welcome to it,” I said. “I don’t want anything which belongs to somebody else.”

“You’d better remember as much the next time you find money,” snapped the Pratt girl. “Your conscience will be easier when you die.”

They say that dying men live over their lives in a. flash—that’s so! When I was dying in black darkness, five fathoms deep under the waters of the Pacific, with a bar of gold in either hand, I remembered what that Pratt girl said to me that day in the glory of the autumn sunshine, my face as red as a frost-touched leaf; it was the day of my bitterest humiliation; I slunk off without daring to look at Celene Kingsley.

I think I know what my main mistake was in my first attempts at writing this tale; I tried to tell the story as if it

had happened to somebody else and the thing was stiffer than a mud-caked tug-line and squealed like a rusty windlass. Of course, I hate to be saying “I” here, there, and everywhere—but there’ll come a place in my tale—you’ll think of it if ever you get as far as that—where there’d be nothing to the story unless you could see with my eyes and feel with my hands. So, bear with me and I’ll reel off the yarn as best I know how, making no apologies after this confession.

Oh, about that first maverick money I ran afoul of! I never saw that money again, of course.

But I did happen to meet Ben Pratt right in front of Judge Kingsley’s house. I’ll not say how big Ben Pratt was, because you’ll think this is only a bragging story. He called me a thief and I decided it was about time to show Levant that the name was not a popular one with me.

I licked him:

Judge Kingsley rushed out with a horsewhip and lashed us apart just as I was finishing Ben up.

“Young Sidney, you’re a cheeky, tough, brazen character,” said the judge. I did not answer him.

It is my nature to take a big lot from all women, considerable from some men, and devilish little from most men. I had nothing at all to say to Celene Kingsley’s father, even though I was rubbing half a dozen swelling welts where his whip had connected with the back of my neck.

“You come of a tough family,” stated the judge.

Right then my uncle Deck arrived at the party; he had been watching the thing from the tavern porch.

“What’s that you say about our family?” he asked the judge.

“I don’t care to stand here and quarrel with you, Decker Sidney.”

“When you horsewhip my dead brother’s boy in the main street you’ll come pretty nigh to having a quarrel with me, seeing that his own father can’t protect him.”

“I merely came out here and stopped a fight which was disgracing our village.”

“It’s a nice thing for one of the ‘forty thieves’ to talk about disgracing a village,” said my uncle.

As young as I was I knew what was meant when folks called Judge Kinglsey one of the forty thieves. He belonged to the syndicate that had grabbed the State’s principal railroad away from the original shareholders; there was political shenanigan and a good deal of foreclosure trickery. I never understood the details, but the fact remained that the syndicate got the railroad.

“A cheap slur from a cheap man,” said the judge, walking away.

I can’t say that I resented that remark very deeply, though I suppose family loyalty should have prompted me to do so. I never in my life came close to my uncle Deck when he did not have the smell of liquor on his breath: On each side of his nose there was a patch of perfectly lurid crimson. He was a horse-trader and he made considerable money.

“That slur of *yours* is a high-priced one,” my uncle shouted. “I have my eye on you, you old hypocrite. There’ll

come a day when that slur will cost you more than you can afford to pay. That's how high-priced it is, Judge Kingsley."

I didn't know what my uncle meant then.

It was a wicked time for me when I did find out, a long while afterward.

II—ENDING WITH A MEETING ON PURGATORY HILL

Table of Contents

MY mother was a good woman—a thrifty, kindly, helpful woman, a good neighbor, in spite of her poverty.

My short temper, my cheeky disposition, my generally ready impulse to grab in on short notice, all belong to the Sidney side, I guess. All we know of the family has come down by word of mouth, and I suspect that the first rovers who came over in the old days when New England was really new were pretty tough characters who had plenty of original nerve to start with and then developed more as occasion required. Well, some of that sort had to come on ahead and smooth things with the ax and crowbar—yes, and with the musket, so that the country could get a good running start.

My mother was a good neighbor, I repeat. Up in the attic, hanging in dried bunches from the beams, were spearmint, thoroughwort, hardback, mullein, pennyroyal, and other pasture herbs which she sent me forth to gather. Her thoroughwort syrup was guaranteed to cure any case of whooping-cough—and she gave freely to all who came to her.

My father was a helpful sort of a man in his own way. He used to volunteer as boss of all the barn-raising bees in our section—but his enemies, made up of a considerable army of the men whom he had licked in his life, said, behind his back, that the only reason he had for helping at a barn-raising was to show off by running the ridgepole first of all the crew, and then to start the regular free fight. He fell off a ridge-pole one day and my mother was widowed.

I take it that her chief ambition in life was to tame the Sidney disposition in me—that earnest desire explaining my involuntary investment in the catechism. My mother's axioms and teachings would have made excellent addenda and foot-notes for any catechism. Always did she counsel me to count ten before speaking angry word or performing angry act; I don't remember that I ever did as she told me, though the Lord Himself knows how much I have suffered in my life on account of that lack of self-restraint. Two days after I bought the catechism my good mother thought it was having its effect on my nature. She saw a boy heave a rock at me in our door-yard and I stood perfectly motionless and speechless.

"That's right, my own son! Count your ten!" she called to me.

But just at that moment a bumblebee was crawling around over my bare foot and I was in no mind to disturb him. Therefore, my enemy was enabled to collect a full supply of rock ammunition and to defy and rout me when at last I was free from the restraint of the bumblebee. It would have been the same if I had waited to count ten. Somehow, as the world is constituted, I have never taken much stock in this watchful-waiting game while your enemy is hustling to pile up his ammunition and you know he is doing so. I may be wrong. Maybe this story of mine will show that I'm wrong. But I hear you say, let's get on to the story!

I mean to do so at once; but if I have paused to pull the curtain aside from my family and my character a bit you may be able to understand some parts of the story a mite better, because, in spite of that catechism, in spite of mother-influence, and perhaps mother-goodness deep down in me, I have butted into adventures which you will not find set down in the volumes of any well-conducted Sunday-school library.

I didn't have my mother long, after my fifteenth birthday.

I was her sole heir; five minutes before she closed her eyes she gave me all her little fortune—to wit, the sweetest smile good mother ever left to bless memory of her, a pat on my hand, a few whispered words in my ear.

And then Uncle Deck took me in hand to make a man of me, so he said.

He wasn't all bad—don't understand me as saying that. He would pass a sleepless night if he failed to cheat a man in a horse trade, but he would sell his shirt before he would allow any old folks in our town to go onto the poor-farm. He

would sneak around with wood and groceries after dark, that big, red face of his like a harvest moon, and when they would start to thank him he would curse the miserable old creatures so horribly that my blood used to run cold. He prided himself on language which, so he said, “would break up a Sunday-school picnic if a little bird sat overhead and twittered it out of a tree.” He saved his choicest profanity for his comments on Judge Zebulon Kingsley. His hatred went far back. I don’t know what started it. Perhaps it began in the natural antipathy such a man as Uncle Deck would entertain for a cold, proud, punctilious, professedly religious man like the judge. Uncle Deck would have it that the judge was a hypocrite, a thief at heart, and my uncle’s constant boast was that some day he would show the judge up; but all that vaporing seemed to be silly spite, without foundation. Judge Kingsley was our rich man; he had been judge of probate, and after retiring from that office he was trusted with funds as a sort of private banker; folks whose estates he had handled as judge just naturally insisted on his keeping control; and he had been town treasurer of Levant for years.

I hated to hear my uncle rave on about such a man; it was as irritating as the barking of a cur.

I have said that my uncle was a horse-trader. Rather, he was a general country dickerer, if you know the kind. He dealt in everything from a sheet of fly-paper to a clap of thunder. He had car-loads of horses sent to him from the West and peddled those to farmers, taking cash or bills of sale or produce or second-hand furniture or anything else which he could turn in a trade. He set me to peddling and

collecting, and it was a mean job. At first I used to believe everything which debtors or sellers would tell me, and the result was that Uncle Deck bawled me out most dreadfully; and thus being abused by both parties, I got so at last that I believed nobody.

Therefore I was in a fair way to be made just the sort of man Uncle Deck desired me to be.

And continually, after I was sufficiently hardened, he impressed on me that I mustn't be bothering him all the time, asking this and that about running the business. I must act for myself and then report to him when he called for an accounting. You shall see how his trying to make a man of me in this fashion turned me into ways which neither he nor I could have forecast. Don't tell me that the activities of this life are very much a matter of individual election, after all. To be sure, a man might elect to live a hermit and might get away with the job in good shape; but if a person throws himself into the ruck of the living, into the running of humanity, he'll be apt to find himself leaping from crag to crag because he has been shooed or jarred.

I ran up against one Juvenal Bird, newly come to town from the rural fastnesses of Vienna plantation—plantation meaning an unorganized township. I had never heard of Mr. Bird, and when he came within range of my vision I rather wondered because I had not; he seemed to be a person of some importance. To be sure, his frock suit was rusty and his plug-hat was fuzzy, but the garb was distinctive.

Mr. Bird was in search of furniture and I showed him our second-hand stock; he ordered liberally and largely—especially largely. He took the biggest stove, the largest

bedsteads, the most expansive tables, and bureaus of breadth. That plug-hat impressed me. When he told me to send the goods out to his house on the Tumble-dick Road, and to call for the pay at my convenience, I did not presume to ask for an advance instalment, after our usual custom.

I promptly found out that this was one affair of business with which I should have bothered my busy uncle, who knew all the cheats of the section.

Mr. Bird was one of the most notable cheats. His raiment was garb discarded by an up-country parson, who pitied Mr. Bird after the latter had been evicted from timber-lands as a dangerous squatter, careless of fire. Mr. Bird installed the furniture in a shack which he had hired, then acted as his own carpenter and narrowed all the doors and the windows. I went out after the money and learned that the law provides for the replevin of furniture, but does not allow a house to be mutilated in order to remove the furniture. Mr. Bird grinned at me through a cracked window and thumbed his nose.

When I reported to my uncle he told me to go and get it. I refrain from quoting the words in which he voiced that command.

“But the law says—” I ventured.

Again I suppress details. My uncle Deck’s opinion of the law would lack authority.

However, being a Sidney, and resenting Mr. Bird’s betrayal of my innocence, and needing a home and a job, I accepted my uncle’s opinion of the law for the time being. I collected a gang of my boy intimates. We went in the night and ripped the stuffing out of Mr. Bird’s nest.

There’s a queer kind of senseless and secret gratification in doing a mob job. The human animal has a lot of primeval instincts which need tickling once in a while. I reckon we boys gratified the wolf streak on that occasion, running in a pack in the night-time.

We enjoyed it so much that we held a meeting a night or so later and organized ourselves as the “Skokums.” I can’t remember how we happened to light on that name. I was chosen as leader.

That first sortie was a great success—Mr. Bird was not in a position to prosecute. We had had a wonderful night, had defied the law, and had escaped punishment.

Judge Kingsley was the only man in town who proclaimed indignation loudly and openly. He expressed himself before a crowd in the post-office and declared that hoodlums had disgraced the town of Levant. He looked straight at me and said he would give a reward of ten dollars for evidence on which the ringleader could be convicted.

“And I would give one thousand dollars to pay for law to set him free,” said my uncle.

“Some day the plug-uglies will be rooted out of this place—and good riddance to ’em,” snarled the judge.

“The snout that goes rooting into that business will get twisted off’n the face of the rooter,” retorted my uncle. He was never very choice in his language. How those crimson patches on his face did glow and how his eyes sparkled!

So, it will be seen, I was not getting on at all with my love-affair.

It is pretty presumptuous in me to refer to it as a love-affair. That would intimate—calling it that—a bit of

reciprocation on the part of Celene Kingsley. But she never showed any visible interest in me, even to looking my way when she met me on the street. I would have liked to attract her attention, for at last I wore shoes and had clothes without patches on them.

The Skokums flourished under cover of the night.

There was Oramandel Bangs. He was rather simple, and always carried his mouth open, and nobody in Levant ever forgot that once a hornet flew in and stung his tongue and it swelled and stuck out of his mouth for days like the end of a bologna sausage.

Oramandel had a sneaking suspicion that witchcraft had never been wholly stamped out by his forefathers in New England.

We decided to convince him that he was right—there's nothing like clinching a man's faith in the good judgment of his ancestors.

We hoisted one of his calves into an apple-tree. He "unwitched" the animal by cutting off its ears and tail before taking it down from the tree.

We tied cords to his ox-chains and hid ourselves and slashed the chains about the dooryard; he ran to the neighbors and reported that the witches had changed his chains into big snakes. We did a lot more things, and then imagination began to do the rest for him. He said the witches wouldn't allow him to do his farm-work, even though he had sumac-wood splinters in all his tools and stuck shears around his chum to make the butter come. Before we realized what mischief a lively imagination can do

to a man, they were obliged to carry the old chap away to the asylum for the insane.

And again Judge Kingsley held forth in the post-office. I guess he did a lot of talking at home, too.

At any rate, Celene Kingsley was mighty well posted, so I discovered.

I met her on Purgatory Hill one day—and never did that name seem to apply so well! I had been out on my uncle's business, and among other plunder in the beach-wagon were two shotes in a crate, and they certainly were taking on about leaving home and mother.

She was alone in her pony-chaise and the shaggy little brute she drove was frightened—and I didn't blame him. I pulled as far into the gutter as I could and waited; I poked the butt of my whip into the crate and prodded those shotes, but that only made them screech the louder.

So she came leading her pony past me. I didn't expect that she would stop and speak to me, but she did. I nearly fell off my seat. And she called me "Mr. Sidney." It was the first time anybody had ever given me a handle to my name. I had pulled my hat off when I saw her coming; when she spoke to me I put it back on again and then took it off so that I could show her that I knew a little something about manners. However, I wasn't at all sure just what I was doing; my head was in a whirl, and I was damning those pigs in my heart.

"I thank you, Mr. Sidney," she said. "Pedro acts like a fool sometimes."

Two hours afterward, I guess it was, I thought of just the right reply to that remark; as it was, I didn't say anything to

her. I couldn’t.

She started on and then stopped and looked at me.

Perhaps she guessed something—I don’t know. Girls can act as if they never notice anything and still they have an eye out all the time; and what they don’t see they know by instinct. At any rate, there was a lot of kindness in her face, and perhaps there was pity in her thoughts.

“I’m afraid I am very bold, Mr. Sidney. I hope you’ll forgive me for speaking to you.”

She hesitated. Right there was another beautiful chance for me to say the good thing which came to me that night after I was in bed. All I could do at the time was duck my head.

“I’d hate to have any of the boys who went to school with me get into trouble on account of their thoughtlessness. I’m sure it’s only thoughtlessness and skylarking. But older folks, you know, don’t understand and cannot sympathize with young folks. Now you won’t tell anybody that I told you something, will you?”

Just think of it! A secret between Celene Kingsley and myself!

I gulped and shook my head.

“Won’t you tell the boys—you’ll know just how to pass the word—that folks are talking of having a detective to watch the village nights?” She probably saw that I was incapable of uttering a sound and she went on, hurrying her words. “Mr. Sidney, of course you understand that I am not picking you out as the ringleader. That’s not why I am asking you to pass the word. But I know you are popular among the boys. They all speak so well of you! And I was so

sorry when I heard that your dear mother had passed on. I wanted to write a bit of a note, but they are very strict at the boarding-school—we are not allowed to write to young gentlemen."

Think of two shotes, squalling their heads off, furnishing accompaniment to that! But I'll say this of the shotes, they had spirit enough to use their voices—I was dumb.

"It would be terrible to have anybody arrested here in Levant for boyish pranks—it's all thoughtlessness, I'm sure. You and I ought to be able to straighten everything out."

I stood up.

"Enough said!" I shouted.

She flinched. Then I realized just how I must have sounded, for she said, "I didn't mean to make you angry!"

I couldn't blame her for mistaking my looks; I was so mad at myself that I wanted to lash my back with my own whip.

"No, no, no! It isn't the way you seem to think it is! I want to say that after this—after what you have said to me—if there's any more cutting-up in this village I'll-strip the pelt off the chap who does the job." I beat my hand on my breast. "It's the proudest day of my life when I can take orders from you."

"But I haven't given orders, Mr. Sidney."

"You have. They're orders to me. The littlest thing you can wish for is orders to me. If you said for me to cut my hand off I'd do it. Oh, you don't know! I have—I don't know how to say it—but for years—oh, I'm crazy—" And I was. It was lunacy provoked by the passion of love trying to outvoice those devilish shotes.

By the funny look she gave me she was taking me at my word. She hurried to step into her little chaise.

“All I mean is this,” I quavered. “I’ll make ’em quit. You look to me. I’ll be responsible. Don’t you worry.”

“I’m sure everything will be all right after this,” she told me. “I’ll depend on you, and I thank you.”

She went on her way, and the burden I had assumed seemed lighter than feathers and more precious than golden ingots.

She had given me her confidence—she had asked me for a service!

She had thought of me and my trouble when she was away at school!

A few minutes before I had not dreamed that she was conscious that such a person as Ross Sidney walked the earth.

Now, at all events, my poor self was in a little corner of her thoughts. She was looking to me for help in something which she had made her own concern.

I rode down Purgatory Hill, hugging my joy and cursing those shotes.

III—ON ACCOUNT OF A GIRL

Table of Contents

I TRUST you have noted, by this time, that my yarn is not a mere chronicle of disconnected incidents. Linked circumstances seemed to be tying me up. One happening had pushed me on to another and I had allowed myself to be pushed. It might be urged, of course, that I had no business in inciting a mob to play hob with Mr. Bird—but I had my own interests to consider, and I had been listening to my uncle's teachings on the subject of looking out for number one.

"You know what happened to your father when he went to running his legs off on somebody else's business," he told me. "If it hadn't been for me helping him in his other scrapes, your mother would have been playing hungryman's ratty-too on the bottom of the flour-barrel oftener than she did. I hope you've got an ambition to be somebody and to have something."

I did have, but you may be sure I did not tell my uncle that my principal hankering to get money was so that I might lay it at the feet of Zebulon Kingsley's daughter.

Now, by the expressed wish of that daughter, I started out to control happenings and to set myself in new ways.

I passed the word to the Skokums, keeping my promise to Celene.

I was obliged to be indefinite, for I was guarding that little secret between her and myself as my most precious treasure.

As I remember it, I put it to the gang this way: "We ought to behave ourselves and protect the good name of the

town.” They laughed at me and asked me if I had joined Judge Kingsley’s Sunday-school class.

I knew they didn’t suspect the truth, nevertheless that dig nearly put me out of countenance on account of the secret I was cherishing. I blushed and stammered and I lost my grip then and there as a leader—and it was the same old story—it was on account of a girl. A girl does rattle the gear of man-business!

One of the fellows remarked that I was getting almighty pious after I had used them to clean up my own dirty job. He said the most of them had matters of their own which needed attention, and wanted to know if I proposed to sneak out on them after all the help they had given me.

I told them that I had thought the thing over carefully and had decided that what we had done to Mr. Bird was not right or lawful and we’d better make no more mistakes.

“Then perhaps you want us to correct that mistake and make up a bee and carry the furniture back to the old cuss,” suggested one of the Sortwell boys.

When I failed to welcome that notion they turned on me in good earnest, and in my own heart I had to admit, looking on the surface of the thing, that they had good reason for thinking that I was both selfish and ungrateful.

In the Sixth Reader, at school, I had found the story of Frankenstein’s monster. I saw that in organizing the Skokums I had built a lively little monster of my own.

“I have a special and a private reason for asking you to quit and be good, boys,” I told them.

“A member who keeps his private and special reasons to himself and doesn’t trust the rest of us isn’t much of a help

in time of trouble," said Ben Pratt. "I have never taken a whole lot of stock in you, Ross Sidney, and now I take less than ever before."

From remarks which were dropped I gathered that the rest of them held similar sentiments.

"They're going to have a detective in here," I told them.

"Who said so?"

But that was Celene Kingsley's secret.

I had hoped that the threat might scare them. It had just the opposite effect; the boys of Levant had never seen a detective, but they had read every five-cent thriller on the subject. To be the object of a real detective's attention seemed like glorious adventure—and they were sure that they were, when on their own prowling-grounds, match for any sleuth who ever dodged behind trees.

But I had stood up before her and had beaten fist upon my breast and had assured her that she could trust all to me. What sort of a knight was I to wear lady's favor and then fail to do and dare in her behalf?

"I had hoped that you knew me better and that I stood higher with you fellows," I said. "I'll admit that you did a big job for me, and I am grateful. But you all had your fun out of it, for you have said so, over and over. You'll have to admit something, yourselves; you'll have to own up that we are ashamed of what we did to poor old Bangs. If you keep on you'll do other things to be ashamed of. I'm advising you to stop."

"We don't want your advice," said Ben.

"Then you'll get something from me which you'll like a blamed sight less than advice."

Plainly they were hungry for information.

“What’ll that be?” asked one of the Sortwell boys.

“Try on any more of your doodle-busting in this town and you’ll find out,” I said. Then I left them and went home.

Some bright chap has made a simile about having as much privacy as a goldfish. At any rate, by leading an open life, one may be in a position to prove an alibi.

I took to spending my evenings in the bar-room of the Levant Tavern.

That was by no means such a roystering sort of a life as it sounds to be. They used to sell liquor in the tavern in the old stage-coaching days, when the place was a post station; the little catty-cornered bar is there in the big room, its worn wood shiny from the dragging of rough fists and from many scrubbings; behind is the cupboard, with wavy glass set in diamond-shaped panes. But the cupboard was bare in my boyhood days and the shelves were dusty. Dodovah Vose, the landlord, was a teetotaler and believed in impressing that principle on others.

“I have seen what liquor will do and undo,” he said when he used to get on to the subject. “In my young days, when the West Injy trade flourished and rum held its place without blushing, I have set in meeting and seen the parson soop a sip of rum-and-water between the firstly and secondly, and so on. It may have improved him and the sermon—I’m not arguing. But do you think that liquor would ever have improved my brother Jodrey and made him the best deep-sea diver on the Atlantic coast, as he is to-day? No, gents! Where a man needs the strength of his arms, the full power of his ten fingers, the quickness of his brain, and the help of

his lungs and a good heart—then he'd better let liquor alone. That's what my brother says and he has been deeper underwater than any other man—and you can look around you and see some of the queer and wonderful things he has brought up for the peerusal of mankind."

The old foreroom was really a storehouse of curious pickings and gleanings which had been sent up-country, from time to time, by the diver brother. It had been one of my earliest haunts, for I had always hit it off nicely with Dodovah Vose. I did not lark about the room or molest the curios, as other boys in the village sometimes did.

On the contrary, I always surveyed them with respect and interest; the awe I felt when I first laid eyes on them never left me, entirely. I have not been able to determine, exactly, whether my boyhood study of those objects inspired the hankering I developed, the burning desire to go down into the depths of the sea some day, or whether the queer things merely catered to my natural instinct in the matter. At any rate, I touched them reverently and I asked many questions of Landlord Vose and he told me hair-raising stories which, he said, his brother had told him. I remember that when I was so young I was still wearing a plaid kilt, I got down on all-fours and stuck my leg in the air at his request; he called it "playing circus," and gave me a penny. He said I was a smart boy and allowed that a smart boy might grow up and be made a diver by Jodrey Vose. So there was an idea put into my head at an early age. And Dodovah Vose used to call me "Lobster Sidney"—a truly deep-water nickname! He had a rather droll idea of a joke—it was to prompt youngsters to go and make fools of themselves. My

folks gave me the middle name of Webster. In order to plague the new schoolma'am, Dodovah Vose told me to insist on the first day of school that my name was Ross Webster Lobster Sidney—and I did, even though the boys in the school laughed themselves sick. Mr. Vose praised me because I had obeyed orders, and gave me a conch-shell on which, by the aid of three finger-stops, one could play more or less of a tune. He had already given to me a shell which whispered in my ear the everlasting murmuring of the great ocean I had never seen.

It was a big fountain-shell from somewhere in the West Indies, and it fairly boomed, deep in its spirals, when I held it to my ear; I sensed all the vastness and the mystery and the solemnity of the ocean depths. The more I listened the better acquainted I seemed to be with a wonderful stranger far away at the other end of a wire.

It really seemed like a call to bigger things, and my job with my uncle was getting less and less to my taste. If there's any such thing as the angels looking down on earth over the parapets of heaven in their hours off duty, some of the things my uncle would do in horse trades, in order to get back at other cheaters, must have grieved the judicious in the upper spheres.

I didn't realize it at the time, but I can look back now and see how my lashings to the life in Levant were in the way of severance, one by one.

I found no comfort in the lull of Skokum activities; I reckoned that the boys were reorganizing and getting ready for a really big slam. I felt as a timid girl must, feel in a