

# A Plot for a Crown

by **Joseph Alexander Altsheler, 1862-1919**

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## **Illustrations**

Fine view of the sea  
We must be cautious  
Flight

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I met them one evening in the billiard room of the hotel. I had become acquainted earlier in the day with a sugar planter from Kauai, down for a short fling in Honolulu. We sat on the Veranda talking south sea talk and slapping at mosquitoes until we became very thirsty. Then we went down to the bar in the basement, and when we had smoothed our throats with a milk punch apiece we strolled into the billiard room. There we saw the three—Conway, the Englishman; Mortimer, the American, and Hughes, the Canadian. Conway and Mortimer were playing billiards, and Hughes was playing critic, declaring with frequent and unnecessary emphasis that if poorer men with a cue lived he had never seen them.

I had heard of them before. The China boy who took care of my room and examined all my property in minutest detail, but never took anything, had given me some hint of them, declaring with much display of the whites of his eyes that „they heap big devils in their own countree.“ I had listened also to some hints from more authentic sources, and hence I viewed the three with interest.

As I have said, Conway was English, excessively English, I may add, with an air that would have become the younger son of a nobleman; Mortimer talked much and loudly, and Hughes, as became his Canadian birthright, tried to look like an Englishman and failed.

My friend from Kauai had heard nothing about these men, and they failed to interest him. He leaned back in his high chair and, the milk punch acting as a becoming nightcap, fell fast asleep. I sat beside him and kept my eye on the billiard players and their friend. Mortimer, true to his nationality, was doing the most talking and in nowise was loath to tell about himself. He was the son of a rich merchant in St. Louis, who, fearing that he was falling; into dissipated ways, had sent him down to Honolulu, where he would be out of the way of temptation.

„Out of the way of temptation!“ said Hughes. „Good Lord!“

Then all three laughed, each in his own fashion, and I, who knew Honolulu so well, laughed also, though, silently. The big planter from Kauai snored, and his sleeping face crinkled into a smile as if he were dreaming that the price of raw sugar had gone up a cent a pound in the San Francisco market.

I could not help hearing what the three men said. Nor was there any reason why I should feel like an eavesdropper, for they talked to the universe of which I was a humble part.

„Yes, it’s a failure,“ said Mortimer, poising his cue across his hand. „It’s been tried in the United States, and it doesn’t work. It’s too cheap and nasty. People want titles and decorations and things of that sort, handles to their names, something they can see and have other people to see. That’s what a man needs to rule with—hunks of meat that he can throw to the animals you know and keep ‘em quiet.“

„You’re right,“ said Conway. „England knows all about it. We tried democracy there once—Cromwell’s time, you know. One man said he was good as another, but wasn’t. Cromwell made himself dictator. Cromwell died. People must have kings and princes back. Couldn’t get along without ‘em. Masses must have something to bow to. Couldn’t bow to each other. Same thing in France when Bonaparte was master. Same thing will be everywhere.“

„Only think,“ said Hughes, „how much is awaiting those in republican countries who have the keenness to foresee the result and the boldness and the diligence to prepare for it!“

„You mean that to the victor belong the spoils—eh, Hughes, my boy?“ said Mortimer. „I guess you’ve hit it, and a man who thinks much of himself ought to prepare for victory.“

The assertions of the American interested me. It was commonplace for an Englishman or a Canadian to attack democracy, though both live under it, and praise the divine right of kings, but never before had I heard an American do so.

But at this point the three ceased to address the universe and talked only to each other. That being the case, I felt that I no longer had a right to listen. I waked up the planter from Kauai, and we went off to bed just as the three ordered cocktails—„and be sure there is plenty of whisky in ‘em, barkeeper.“

The next morning my China boy showed me a silver dollar Mortimer, the American, had given him as a tip. „He velly good man,“ he said, ringing the coin to show that it was real. „He rich as mandarin.“ When I went out on the piazza, the three were there, all attired in white duck and bearing themselves with the dignity of the royal born. I also sat on the piazza, which was not forbidden to plebeians, and presently Hughes, who was the least haughty of the three and content at times to shine in the reflected light of Conway, spoke to me.

Illustration:

Fine view of the sea

„Fine view,“ he said, pointing to the sea.

It was not especially fine, merely an expanse of salt water that makes one seasick, but I admitted that it was fine, and, being coparceners in the lie, the way to conversation was opened. I was introduced to the others, and they graciously admitted me to their circle.

„Business or pleasure?“ asked Conway briefly.

„A little of both,“ I replied.

„Humph! I don’t know about business,“ said Conway. „Never befuddled my mind with it, at least not the sort you mean. But this ought to be a good place for business of a more important kind—affairs, I should call them.“

He stopped and looked significantly at the palace, gleaming white amid the green foliage. Then he whistled a note or two. Mortimer and Hughes also whistled a note or two and looked at each other with much meaning. I was puzzled.

„I don’t understand your allusions, gentlemen,“ I said.

„Didn’t intend you should understand them. Beg pardon. No offense meant,“ said Conway. „Merely a little secret of ours. We are here for pleasure, nothing but pleasure. Are we not, boys?“

„Why, of course,“ said Mortimer.

„We want to loaf and rest, rest and loaf, and look at the tropical scenery and the brown Hawaiian girls in their white holohus. Honolulu is a great place for tourists to come and idle away their time.“

„But if ripened fruit falls into the hands of an idler there is no reason why he should cast it away,“ said Conway.

I assented very heartily to the proposition and hoped that Conway would tell more, but Mortimer skillfully conducted the conversation away to the possibilities of Hawaii as a coffee growing country, a subject that we debated with logic and force increased by the fact that none of us knew anything about it.

Two or three days later I saw them going out in very gorgeous evening dress, and as I chanced to stay up very late that night I was at the hotel when they returned. They were smoking cigarettes and were in a state of jubilation. Mortimer rattled some silver into the palm of the cab driver, and when all three, arm in arm, came up the steps of the piazza they saw me.

„Hello, old boy!“ exclaimed Mortimer jovially. „Come down to the bar and have a milk punch with us. No reason why we shouldn't be jolly, is there, fellows?“

„No reason at all,“ said Hughes, „especially when things are going so well with us. What will they say of this in America and England—eh, lads?“

„Say,“ echoed Conway, „they can't say anything except that we are true bloods and worthy to wear what we may win. But now for the milk punches, fellows, and after them something a little stronger.“

We drank the milk punches and after them „something stronger,“ which was a curious foamy drink infused with the strong gin that the Kanakas love. It set the little wheels that lie in the top of the head close to the skull buzzing with great zeal and enthusiasm, and our affection for each other increased at once. Mortimer made the barkeeper fill up the glasses again. Then he lifted his own glass to the level of his eyes and watched the white foam on the surface.

„Gentlemen,“ he said, „let us drink to the success of a great enterprise that shall be nameless for the moment. Gentlemen, only those who do and dare deserve to win, and to such we will drink.“

The machinery in my head buzzed furiously and occasionally creaked, but I did not mean to be less enterprising than they, and I drank to the success of the great and nameless enterprise. The warmth I showed seemed to increase their confidence in me. We took another drink and became brothers.

„You're a gentleman and a good fellow,“ said Conway, putting his hand upon my shoulder. „Haven't seen a finer since I came to the islands.“

„So he is,“ said Mortimer, „and he ought to be one of us. We need good men in our business, don't we—eh, Hughes?“

He slapped Hughes vigorously on the back, and the Canadian, returning the blow, smiled most meaningfully.

I thanked them and asked to be initiated.

„You can keep a secret?“ asked Mortimer.

I assured him that I could. This seemed to satisfy them, and Mortimer asked me to come to their apartments. They had three connecting rooms in the hotel, and they bowed me into the first, following and locking the door.

„Don't be surprised at our furniture,“ said Mortimer, turning on the electric lights, which always seemed to me to be out of place in tropical islands.

I found myself surrounded by kings and queens and princes and princesses. They stared at me from all the walls—John, Edward, James, Charles, Catherine, Mary, Elizabeth—through the numbers from one up, like the houses in a street.

„Merely a little fad of ours,“ said Conway, pointing at the pictures. „Royal folks they, but most of ‘em dead and gone. Want to get used to their company. Nothing like habit to put one at ease in loftiest station.“

Hughes mixed another vigorous drink for us and soon afterward I noticed that the royal pictures had doubled in number, but I would not allow the circumstances to divert my attention just then from the matter in hand. They produced cigars, and we began to smoke. The others looked toward Mortimer as if he were to be spokesman, and the American took his time. He blew up rings of smoke and watched them until they dissipated themselves against the ceiling. Presently he asked me if I would give my sacred word of honor as a gentleman to keep secret all that he might say to me. I assured him I would. He began to blow up the rings of smoke again, and I would have grown impatient, but I was convinced that Charles I of England and Catherine the Great of Russia were trying to flirt with each other from wall to wall, and my eyes would rest upon them.

„Would you like to be a king?“ Mortimer suddenly asked me.

„I—I don’t know,“ I replied, surprised at his question. „Give me time to think about it.“

I was looking just then at Charles I and remembered his fate. I felt of my head doubtfully.

„It doesn’t matter,“ said Mortimer briefly, „for we don’t mean for you to have a throne. Conway already has a double mortgage on that place. But if you stood by us like a hero we might make you a prince.“

„Or a duke at any rate,“ said Hughes. „You know I’m to be a prince.“

I thought Hughes was becoming a little jealous of me, and I determined to give him more cause.

„If I can’t be a prince,“ I said, „I won’t be anything. If I’m to join your party, I won’t be the lowest in rank.“

„Don’t quarrel over questions of precedence,“ said Conway. „It’s bad form. Both of you shall be princes as sure as I’m to sit on a throne.“

He spoke with great emphasis, and Charles I seemed to wink at me from the wall. I asked again to be initiated, for as yet I had merely the vaguest sort of notion of their plans.

„It’s short and sweet,“ said Conway. „I mean to be king of Hawaii, Mortimer’s to be prime minister, and Hughes is to be commander in chief of the army. All arranged. We’re tired of being commoners and propose to cut the old life double quick.“

„And a pretty little kingdom it will be, and not so very little either,“ said Mortimer—„as big as Massachusetts or Wales and nearly as big as Holland or Belgium, quite enough for a small crowd of good fellows. Is there any particular place that you want?“

I had several things in mind, but I thought it best not to be too hasty, as Charles I, with the prodigious ruffles around his throat, continually bobbed up before me.

„I can wait a bit on that,“ I said. „But you seem to dispose of the whole thing in easy fashion. How are you to become king, Mr. Conway?“

„By the easiest and most gentlemanly of all devices—by marriage,“ said Mortimer, speaking for Conway. „Conway is a handsome fellow, with dignity and

grace. Don't blush, Conway. It's true, and I merely mention it in order to explain myself. Though a commoner in England, he has the royal blood of the Normans in his veins, and no one is more fit to be a king. The queen of Hawaii has no children. The heir to the throne is a very young girl going to school in Germany. Conway will go over there, marry her and become king, and we will be the chief props of his throne. It will all be peaceful. There will be no revolution. Could there be a finer plot for a crown?"

"The plot's all right," I said, "but I'm not so sure of the execution."

"We haven't a doubt," replied Mortimer. "It's by great deeds that men become great. We've arranged all, and it can't possibly go wrong, can it, boys?"

Both Conway and Hughes replied with great emphasis that it couldn't. They seemed to be in a state of perfect satisfaction. They leaned their heads back and calmly blew the smoke of their cigars upward, which, I take it, is always evidence of a contented mind.

"As you say, Mortimer," remarked Conway presently, "it's a pretty kingdom as it stands—large enough; not too large; ideal climate; tractable population; no concert of the powers; no eastern question to look after; nothing to do but have a good time; most desirable throne I know of; Mortimer prime minister; no neighboring countries to quarrel with; nothing for prime minister to do but have good time; Hughes commander in chief of army; nobody to fight; nothing for commander in chief to do but have good time. Great plot, by Jove!"

"But what will you do with the whites?" I asked. "There is a large white population here, you know."

"Oh, missionaries and traders and their sons and grandsons!" said Conway. "We won't hurt them. I'll extend my protecting arm over them, and they can go on with their missions and their trading. My kingdom must have revenues."

I heard a very gentle footfall in the hall outside and raised my hand as a hint for silence. The others listened, and we heard the footfall again.

Illustration:

We must be cautious

"Gentlemen," said Mortimer, "we are watched, suspected. We must be cautious, or we will lose our heads. There are spies, eavesdroppers, in the hall. We will see, and if trouble should come we must take care of ourselves."

All three took revolvers, from a bureau drawer, and Mortimer cautiously opened the door. The hall was empty. It was dimly lighted by a single electric light. We searched the hall and the cross halls, but found nothing.

"Perhaps it was merely one of the China boys carrying a pitcher of ice water for somebody," I said.

"No; it was no China boy, no pitcher of ice water," said Hughes gloomily. "It was a spy upon us, seeking to penetrate our designs."

We returned to the rooms, and Mortimer locked the door very carefully.

"Gentlemen," he said, "in this emergency, threatened by an unseen danger, I do not know of anything else to do but to take another drink," which we all did and in consequence felt equal to the emergency.

„Gentlemen,“ said Mortimer, „this hotel is too straitened and dangerous a place in which to carry on a plot for a crown. Our conference must end for the night, and we must meet elsewhere tomorrow night.“

Nobody disputed his wisdom, but there was some disagreement about the meeting place on the next night. At last Hughes suggested a grove of cocoanut trees on the Waikiki road. The trees grew so close together that it was dark in the grove in the daytime, and it would be black as a bat at night. It was just the place, and we selected the northeast corner of the grove as the particular spot. Each man on entering it was to utter a peculiar whistle, and if any one had arrived before him he was to respond similarly.

„I suggest,“ said Conway, „that we drive to the rendezvous in evening dress. Do not remember to have read of any conspirators in evening dress. Will divert suspicion. Spies will think we're going out in the country to dinner or other entertainment.“

What he said looked reasonable. So we decided to wear evening dress and dismiss our cabmen at a certain corner, to which they were to return for us at 3 o'clock in the morning. The hour of meeting was midnight, which seemed to us the most fitting time for a plot such as ours.

My room was in one of the cottages in the hotel yard, and when I left their rooms I felt as if a dozen men were watching me. I found myself trying to deaden the noise of my footsteps in the hall, and whenever I came to a corner I shrank back afraid that unknown men were waiting there to seize me for high treason. But I passed all the corners safely and stepped into the yard, where the cool air felt very good upon my face. A light night breeze sighed through the palms. Two or three electric lights up the street twinkled faintly. A native policeman, his club under his arm, slept placidly, leaning against a fence. I could see no spies nor any trace of them, but I felt sure they were about.

I reflected a little before attempting the passage across the yard to the cottage. It would be best for me to be bold and careless, to affect innocence. I walked across the yard, whistling, safely and stepped lightly up the steps of the cottage. Before entering I took one last look, but I could not see that I was followed, though there was nothing to prove that the spies were not hid somewhere in the shrubbery.

When I was in my room, I locked the door and put my trunk before it. Then I turned out the electric light and sprang into bed. I could not go to sleep. I lay there and, knowing nothing else to do, listened and listened. For a long time I heard nothing, but at last a sound came to my ear like that made by many feet marching in unison. I thought at first that I deceived myself, but I continued to hear it, and then I heard, too, a steady thump, thump, like the regular beating of a drum. A file of soldiers coming to arrest us! But why should they beat a drum to announce their coming? Perhaps they felt so sure of their quarry that caution was not necessary. I grew cold all over. I might leap from my bed, throw on my clothes and escape into the mountains somewhere. But Oahu was a small island, and they would be sure to find me at last if I did not starve to death first. No! It would be best for me to stay where I was and swear I was innocent. When I had come to this determination, I noticed that the sound of marching feet and the beating of the drum had ceased. Listening intently, I could not hear either again, and after awhile I went to sleep.

I awoke very late the next day. My head felt very heavy, and there was a bad taste in my mouth. While I dressed and shaved I composed my mind and concluded I had suffered some needless alarms the night before. It was not high treason to undertake to marry a princess, and if anybody wanted to hang me I would have the United States send a fleet of ironclads to my rescue. Before I was ready for breakfast the China boy came to straighten up the room.

„You sleep very late,“ he said. „You drink heap big glass last night.“

His remark was impertinent, but it was true, and I did not rebuke or answer him. It was so late that the luncheon hour had arrived. I went into the dining room and sat down at a table in the corner. Across the room I saw the three at another table. I guessed that they, too, had just risen from their beds, but they looked fresher than I felt. Conway waved his hand to me and made some gestures with his fingers like the deaf talking to the deaf. I did not know what it meant, but supposed it was a sign of our secret understanding. I also twiddled my fingers, and the three smiled meaningly. Then we addressed ourselves to our roast bananas.

The three left the dining room before me, and I did not see them again until the afternoon, when I passed them on Queen street. They were arm in arm and walking very slowly. As they passed me Mortimer said in a low and solemn voice:

„Do not forget. The hour is midnight.“

„The hour is midnight, and I will not forget,“ I repeated.

They strolled gravely on, and I turned into a Chinaman's shop to try on a pair of new shoes he was making for me.

I ate supper late, but my appetite was not good. I was thinking too much of the midnight hour to be hungry. I drank two cups of hot coffee, which I thought would steady my nerves and brace me up. Then I went to my room and arrayed myself very carefully in evening dress, the uniform of the conspirators. For further adornment I placed a rose in my buttonhole and went forth.

I found a cabman, a native who appeared to have no curiosity. He smiled amiably at my evening dress, but asked no questions. I dismissed him at the designated corner and took my way to the cocoanut grove. I met no one and arrived in safety at the trees. It looked so very black in the grove that I hesitated about entering. Had there been any wild animals in Hawaii I would not have gone in at all, but I knew there could be no danger except from men, and I stepped softly into the shadow, which swallowed me up at once. I uttered the signal whistle, and to my infinite gladness the ready response came. I stepped forward, feeling my way cautiously, and a big bulb of light struck me between the eyes. I uttered a little exclamation and believed I was betrayed, but the familiar voice of Mortimer announced that it was all right.

„It's merely a little lantern that I brought along for convenience,“ said he. „This place is so confoundedly dark. All the others are here, and we may as well begin our plans at once.“

We found a fallen cocoanut palm, and all sat down upon it. Mortimer put out the lantern, and we sat for nearly a minute in silence.

„We ought to begin our plans,“ said Mortimer presently. „If a man undertakes a plot, he ought to carry it out.“



So I thought also; but, being an amateur at the business, I did not like to say anything.

„I think we ought to arrange for a division of the kingdom,“ said Hughes.

„I don't see that there's to be any division, Hughes,“ said Conway, rather sharply. „I'm to be king, and that's the end of it.“

„Oh, I don't mean that,“ said Hughes hastily. „Don't think I'm trying to get up a revolution against you, Conway. I meant the distribution of authority under you. Of course you will live at the palace here, but I should think you would want lieutenants or deputies on the other islands. It would be best for the people to be confronted always by some personal representative of the royal authority.“

„That's very sensible of you, Hughes,“ said Conway. „How would you like to go down to Hawaii as governor?“

He asked the latter question of me, but I did not see the proposition favorably. It is a very rough voyage from Honolulu to Hawaii, and I am subject to seasickness. I said I would prefer to remain in the capital and hold some high office there.

„Oh, well, it doesn't matter,“ said Conway, good naturedly. „Perhaps I'd best keep you with me, and it might be the wisest thing to make a Kanaka, some chief of the old Kamehameha family, governor of Hawaii. It would please the people and attach them to my dynasty.“

„The idea is good,“ said Mortimer, „and we ought to have native governors for Maui and Kauai too. We must identify ourselves thoroughly with the island. We must not be foreign in any particular. All people like to think their rulers are the same as themselves, only a little better, and they are quick to resent importations.“

„Then I'm glad they don't stick to the old native dress,“ said Hughes. „I don't think I'd look well as commander in chief of the army with a feather headdress and a warclub.“

„You shall have the most magnificent uniform that I can buy you in Europe, Hughes,“ said Conway. „By the way, I think I shall change the present uniform of the army. It isn't bright enough. Mortimer, can't you light that lantern of yours and give us just a ray or two? It's so deucedly dark in here it gives my flesh the creeps.“

Mortimer obeyed and threw the light in a complete circle around us, but disclosed nothing save the stems of the palms. Their spreading tops formed a perfect canopy. A sea breeze had begun to blow, and the leaves rustled sadly. We heard a whistle on the Waikiki road. Quick as a flash Mortimer turned out the light, and we sat on the log, our pulses thumping. We heard another whistle farther up the Waikiki road, and Mortimer ejaculated:

„The spies again! We have been watched and followed!“

A third time we heard the whistle, but farther up than ever.

„The grove is surrounded!“ said Hughes. „Our enemies are numerous!“

I heard somebody's teeth chattering. I did not feel at all comfortable.

„Do you think that we're really followed?“ asked Conway as we heard the whistle again.

„I've no doubt of it,“ said Mortimer.

„Then,“ said Conway, „if it comes to the worst, you must die like men and I like a king.“

„In the old times,“ I said, „when a Roman found life no longer worth living he fell upon his sword and died.“

„We have no swords,“ said Hughes. „I’ve a revolver at the hotel, but there was no pocket for it in this confounded evening dress.“

„At least we ought to make some effort,“ said Mortimer. „Let’s creep to the edge of the grove and play the spy ourselves. Perhaps we can escape even yet. We’d better hold to each other’s hands, so we won’t lose anybody in the darkness.“

There was comfort in the suggestion, and we adopted it. We thought it better to bear away from the Waikiki road, where the spies seemed to be, or at least the majority of them. We bent our course toward the sea, stepping very slowly. Suddenly I heard the swish of something like a whip lash, and Conway uttered a cry. I thought we were lost, but Conway said between British oaths:

„It was the bough of a bush that slapped me in the face. I’m sure it left a prodigious welt, which won’t help my dignity when people see me tomorrow.“

„Never mind about that now,“ said Mortimer.

„But a king must preserve his dignity,“ said Conway.

There was no disputing his assertion, and we resumed our slow advance. We stopped presently to see if we could hear the whistling again, but the night was silent.

„Perhaps they’ve entered the wood to take us,“ whispered Hughes.

„If so, they won’t dare to show a light for fear of a shot from us,“ said Mortimer, „and doubtless we’ll be able to give ‘em the slip yet. Come on, boys, and be very careful.“

We advanced without trouble for about a minute more. Then Conway fell into a little gully, pulling the remainder of us after him. We made a great noise as we fell, and two or three of us could not help swearing. But the tumult did not bring the spies upon us, though I expected momentarily to feel heavy hands upon my shoulders.

„We must be more cautious, gentlemen,“ said Mortimer, „if we would save our necks. I have no mind to swing under a gibbet or even to stand up before a file of soldiers while a sergeant counts *one-two-three-fire!*“

We were approaching the edge of the grove, for we could see some gleams of light between the long, slender stems of the cocoanut palms. It behooved us now to be exceedingly cautious. There was a clear moon, and away from the shelter of the trees a human figure would be visible some distance. We came near to the edge of the wood and stooped.

„Look! Look! The spies!“ said Conway, pointing an agitated finger.

About 20 yards from the edge of the grove I saw two or three dark figures. They seemed to be moving slightly, like men who are watching and who sway back and forth to ease their position. Without waiting for a word of caution all of us shrank farther back into the grove, and again I heard somebody’s teeth rattle. Here was a quandary. Our escape in that direction was cut off. How I blessed the thick blackness of the cocoanut grove which sheltered us for the moment! We held a little conference, talking in very low whispers.

„We must stick together, at least while we’re in the grove,“ said Mortimer. No one of us had any desire to leave the others.

It was apparent that we must get out of the grove before daylight came. We decided to attempt escape on the side farthest from town. Again we began our slow and painful advance in the darkness. It was a good half hour before we came to the light. Then we saw nothing in the open, and up went our spirits at what we considered the certain prospect of escape. But when we were within three feet of the line that marked where the shadow of the grove and the moonlight in the open met we heard again that fatal whistle. It proceeded from a spot a hundred yards away, but it sounded very loud in the quiet night.

We tumbled back among the palms and did not stop retreating until we were near the center of the grove. I confess that my spirits sank very low. Certainly it seemed as if the net had been well spread for us, and its meshes were too fine to permit our escape.

„The grove has four sides. There is another left. We must try that,“ said Mortimer after we had waited 15 minutes.

Forward we went. I felt like an animal shut up in an iron cage and vainly trying to break out. If this side of the grove also should be closed against us, no hope of escape would be left. We came near the edge, and all four of us groaned at the same time. There was a stone fence about a hundred feet from the grove, and we could see three or four figures leaning easily against it. More spies! Certainly they were abundant around the grove.

„We are doomed indeed,“ said Conway. „Our enemies recognize our value and have neglected no precaution.“

There was nothing to do but to retreat again into the heart of the grove, where we remained for quite half an hour, stupefied and unable to talk.

When my voice came back to me, I asked Mortimer what time he thought it was.

„Daybreak will come in two hours,“ he said.

„Then we must get out of here, and that very soon. We must make one more attempt,“ I said. I felt desperate.

„What would you propose?“ asked Mortimer.

„I propose,“ I replied, „that we go out on the side of the Waikiki road and make a break for it. If these fellows shoot at us, their aim is likely to be bad in the night light. There are banana and rice fields on the other side of the road, and I think we can dodge our pursuers among them. After that we'll have to take care of ourselves as best we can.“

We had a short council of war. We recognized the fact that we were reduced to extremities, and my plan was the only one that seemed to yield us the shadow of a chance. Necessity was behind us with a sharp stick, forcing us up to the issue. Our resolve taken, we wasted no time, but slipped back toward the Waikiki road. We did not stop at the edge to see if the spies were about.

„Now,“ said Mortimer, „run for it, boys!“

Illustration:

Flight

We dashed into the road and in a moment were across it into a banana field. I expected to hear shots and to feel the twinge of a bullet, but neither gun nor pistol was fired. Instead I heard the thump of footsteps. They wanted to take us alive and

hang us! Heavens, how the thought made me run! I dashed down by a row of banana bushes and ran lightly for 50 yards. Then I slipped and fell into one of the drains between the rows. But I was out again in a moment, wiping the muddy water from my lips, and ran on. I looked around for my companions, but saw nothing of them, nor did I hear any footsteps except my own. I hoped their fortune had been as good as mine and that they, too, had escaped. Beyond the banana fields was a thicket of algaroba bushes, where I lay for a long time, resting. The thicket was so dense that I lay like a wild beast in his lair and felt safe from observation and pursuit. I neither heard nor saw anything, and I felt sure that I had evaded pursuit. I crept out of the bushes and looked at myself. I was plastered with mud, and one of the tails of my dress coat was gone.

What was I to do? I did not think about it long. I took the boldest course, for I had gone through so much in one night that I was not willing to go through any more. It was not yet day. I would go back to the hotel, slip into the cottage unobserved and go to sleep. Then things could take care of themselves. I had not done anything that was a hanging matter.

I started back to Honolulu and trudged along unmolested, though I am willing to confess that I was badly scared several times. Twice, at first glance, I took bushes by the wayside, waving slightly in the sea breeze, to be men. Once a native on a pony passed me, whistling. But I reached the cottage unspoken by a soul and with deep thankfulness entered my bedroom and again locked the door behind me. I buried my tattered and discolored evening dress in the bottom of my trunk. Then I crept into bed and soon forgot all alarms in a sound slumber.

I awoke late in the day, dressed myself with great care in a suit of white duck and went out on the street. I saw that I must affect a bold and careless air.

But I was struck with surprise and alarm at what I saw. Many people were about, and their manner and the mysterious whispers in which they talked to each other indicated that something of great importance had occurred. I dared not ask. My fears at once told me what it was. My friends had been taken, and the whole plot was discovered. Should I confess my guilt and suffer with them, or should I take advantage of the present opportunities and escape?

I sauntered down toward the palace. Nobody seemed to pay any heed to me, and I grew bolder. At the main gate to the palace yard I saw armed guards. Then I was right. The explosion had come. I felt very sorry for Mortimer and Conway and Hughes. There was a great crowd before the gate, kept back a little by the rifles and bayonets of the guards.

I pressed into the crowd and, looking over the heads of some people shorter than I, saw three men, in torn and muddy evening dress, leaning disconsolately against the iron fence. They were Mortimer, Conway and Hughes, and they looked as if they had just escaped from the bush and the mire.

They were not prisoners. The crowd seemed to care nothing for them. I pushed my way through and tapped Conway on the shoulder.

„What is this? What does it mean?“ I asked.

He raised his crushed silk hat from his eyes and looked gloomily at me.

„Why, haven't you heard?“ he said. „The missionaries have dethroned the queen and established the republic! Long live the republic!“

