

COCONUTS

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE E. WOLFE

*He Returned to His Chair
and Kept Ward There for
a While. Once He Looked
at His Watch and Jaw
With Satisfaction That it
Had Run Down*



THERE is in many men a certain single-mindedness, a fixity of interest amounting to passion; and when such an emotion is once firmly seated you may take that man's future as determined, whether for good or ill. Your statesman has a passion for power; you will find, if you search his soul, that he is in his heart utterly assured of the importance of the mistress whom he serves. He seeks to move and direct the destinies of others not so much for his selfish gain as from a conviction that he has a message; that it is of vital importance to the world that he be heard and followed. Such singleness of mind may fairly be called an essential to success. If a man wishes to manufacture a soft drink that shall become nationally famous, he must begin with or acquire the conviction that that beverage is beyond compare; that it combines the gifts of transient pleasure and permanent health in a surpassing degree.

I have heard a vegetable jobber speak almost devoutly of the virtues of the onion. Such passions as this mold lives for good and ill.

The fortunate man is he whose passion and profession coincide; for then there is no strife within him, but a sure ascendancy. When vocation fights with avocation the struggle may be long and victory bitter in the end. A man may be a banker, and collect first editions still; but the love nearest his heart will drive out the other at the last, and his longing is toward her always. Philosophy is all very well in its way; a well-poised mind capable of determining the relative importance of a rare postage stamp and a new railroad may make for mild contentment. But it will never experience the hot fire of happy zeal or the purging depths of black despair.

It is, of course, incidentally true that a man may serve a mistress and despise her still. Such a man, you might suppose, must be a weak and spineless thing.

Yet—let us have a look at Wadlin.

Wadlin's passion was for figures. He loved them with a curious yearning; gazed over them as a bibliophile fondles an old and precious volume. They were to him the most beautiful thing in the world. At home at night, in his small single room, he liked to draw out a pad of clean yellow paper and write figures on it; liked to watch them form and break ranks and reform again as though they were soldiers; liked to make them march in smooth progression. To his eyes 2-4-6-8-10 was a thing of beauty; 3-6-9 had an exotic charm. And he would carry the sequence 1-2-4-8-16 on and on till he had covered pages, for sheer love of the magic of the thing. He liked to add columns in which the digits came in such arrangements as 7-4-3-3-2-5-4-2-6; his quick eye, without effort, resolved this into 7-7-5-5-6-6 and set the total down.

The multiplication table to him was sweeter than the Song of Songs; and to take such a sum as 279936, and dividing it by 2 and by 3, whittle it inexorably down to unity was an operation which had about it the stern drama of an ancient tragedy. To divide a number into its factors delighted him; and he had sought through tremendous vistas to discover numbers which could not be factored. He knew the orderly ways that digits have, and he knew a thousand and one tricks they may be taught to play. An incorrect equation was to his eyes the ugliest thing in nature.

This man had kept a personal cash account since he was seventeen years old, and had it balanced to a penny. He used to like to figure what his average earnings had been, by the year, by the month, by the week, by the day, by the hour, and even by the minute. He could have told you, to seven places of decimals, his earnings by the second during his working hours; and he had a record running back nine years of the exact number of minutes he had spent in bed. For nineteen months and fourteen days past he had been keeping this record in more complete form, so that he

was able to tell you, for that length of time, exactly how every minute of his time had been spent. He would have preferred to amplify this, recording the totals by seconds; but his watch was subject to small inaccuracies and he did not feel justified in buying a new one. Instead, he worked out a mathematical table of allowances for these variations.

As accessories to this passion of his he loved sharp lead pencils, clean white paper, and neatly ruled columns in a blank ledger.

He was about thirty-five years old. If you had asked him he would have said just that, dropping his eyes a little; but if you won his confidence and asked him exactly how old he was, he could have looked at his watch and told you to the minute. The statement would have been based on the assumed time of his birth. There was no exact record available; but he had made some researches in the matter and arrived at a hypothetical hour and minute which he used as a base in all such calculations. Nevertheless, the necessity of using an approximation always irked him sore.

He was, in his stocking feet, five feet eight and fourteen thirty-seconds of an inch tall, morning measurement. Sometimes at night he fell as low as seven thirty-seconds. His weight ranged between two extremes: The lowest on record was a hundred and thirty-one pounds, seven ounces; the highest a hundred and thirty-eight pounds, two ounces. His statistics covered only the six years, four months, nine days—on the first of July—since he bought and set up and had tested his elaborate bedroom scale. He ate between two thousand and twenty-one hundred calories a day. It was three hundred and eleven steps from his room to the Subway platform, and two hundred and nine from the Subway platform to his office stool, always assuming that in the elevator he stood still just within the door. For the year 1924 he walked an average of sixteen and four-sevenths steps in reaching his seat in the Subway trains after arriving on the platform, and an average of sixteen and eleven-thirteenths steps from his seat to the foot of the

stair. He never used the escalators. He could have told you the average time it took him to reach the office, to be served at the restaurant where he lunched, to get home at night. His life was spent in a world full of figures; they were his familiar playf[ello]ws.

The fact that he had no other friends may have been cause or consequence of this preoccupation on Wadlin's part. But whatever the cause, he was a little man very much alone. He once calculated that for a period of thirty days, outside the office matters not connected with his work, he spoke to but thirty-three persons, was spoken to by only nineteen, and changed a total of fifteen hundred and thirty-two words, of which he spoke nine hundred and one. His only living relative was an uncle in Chicago, and the mathematical probabilities were that this uncle would die on the seventh of June, 1931, at thirty-seven minutes past eleven in the morning.

Wadlin worked in the office of Dean Story, a contractor whose special concern was with public buildings and large construction; and Wadlin's particular province was mathematical. Thus his daily tasks were a long debauch; but he hid this fact from those about him, feeling a furtive shame. Only at home, where the world did not pry, did he indulge to the full his dark and secret passion, revel in his columns of figures unashamed.

Story was not a mathematician; he was an artist. He had done the grind at figures necessary to secure an architect's degree, but proceeded to forget them as soon as the need for them was passed.

"I can always hire that sort of thing done," he used to say. "When I need it." Wadlin had heard him say this.

Story studied in Paris, came back with a cultivated taste and a certain genius for design. Accident led him from planning buildings into erecting them; he discovered in himself a talent for business, and in effect abandoned his profession for this new career. The field into which he had plunged was one hitherto shared by two or three concerns; he found himself in competition with Dana, and Asquith, and with Marr.

Marr was the Titan; the man about whom stories grew. In the whirlpool of competition he not only kept himself afloat, but he rode serenely. His methods were frankly adapted to the problems he found it necessary to solve. He made them no secret; himself used to tell with gusto the story, for example, of the lithograph. It was an incident in which he took an almost childish pride.

The contract in question involved the construction of a building at one of the state institutions, and Marr and Dana and Asquith were all bidding. Bids to be opened on the seventh of April, at noon, in the office at the State House. The building to be of reinforced-concrete design, not only as to outer walls but as to floors and partitions and the very roof itself. Marr did his own concrete work, but Dana and Asquith would have this work done by subcontractors.

"I knew I could underbid Dana," Marr told Story one day. "But Asquith bothered me. He'd get Ryan to do his superstructure, and Ryan could get down pretty low on his figure if he wanted to. I had to find out how low. Ryan wouldn't give Asquith his figure till the morning of the seventh, and there'd be no chance of a leak after that. It was up to me. So I went to see Ryan; tried to talk turkey to him.

"I told him first that I wanted advice; pretended not to know Asquith had come to him. Offered him a thousand dollars for an estimate; said I'd take his figure as a basis for my own bid. He wouldn't talk. Told me he was tied up.

"Then I offered him the subcontract if he'd make me a figure low enough, and he said he was tied up with Asquith.

"I let it ride for a while, and the next time I offered to bet him that the figure he made Asquith would be below three hundred thousand. Offered to bet him five thousand that. If he'd taken me I'd have counted on his putting it at three hundred or above, and I'd have scaled that a thousand or two. But he wouldn't take me up."

Then Marr chuckled and lighted a fresh cigar. "I was pretty well up against it," he confessed. "And I got up to go, looking around the office; and I saw this lithograph on the wall. A lot of sheep in a pasture and a railroad train in

the background. Looked like a railroad calendar. It tickled me, and I said to Ryan, 'That's some picture you've got there.' Joking. But he said, 'You bet it is. A lot of people haven't sense enough to see it, but those sheep are right.' And I caught on right away. I said I'd like to buy the picture; and he wouldn't sell, and I offered him five thousand, and went up to eight thousand for it, and bought it. Carried it out of there under my arm.

"Told him I was going to figure on a basis of three hundred thousand for the superstructure. And the figure he gave Asquith was three hundred and ten. That's one way of doing business, my son."

Story laughed politely. "The answer seems to be to keep away from Ryan," he commented.

Marr shook his head robustly. "Lord, they're all the same," he urged. "You're in a cutthroat game, my boy. Dog eat dog. Might as well make up your mind to that. They'll break you if they can."

"The same to you and many of them," Story remarked; and Marr laughed and said:

"Pshaw, no hard feelings. I'm just telling you." And went upon his way.

He came in upon another day, and it happened that Wadlin was in Story's office. Story had been giving the little man facts and specifications on a building that was projected, while Wadlin noted them down in his small, precise hand.

When Marr came in Wadlin rose to go back to his desk, but Story said, "Sit still, Mr. Wadlin. Morning, Marr."

So Wadlin understood that Story wished to be rid of the other as soon as might be, and he held his ground.

Marr, it appeared, had nothing important to say; he spoke casually of business, of a building upon which he was engaged, of the weather and the prospects of the Braves. Story answered briefly, almost curtly. And Marr by and by leaned forward on the other's desk and produced a bit of paper.

"Here's a funny trick with figures I came across the other day," he announced. "Give me a number with two digits in it." (Continued on Page 186)



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Story shook his head. "Figures don't mean anything to me," he replied. "Wadlin's my man for that."

Marr grinned. "I do my own figuring," he declared. "Then there's no mistake."

"Wadlin doesn't make mistakes," Story replied. "He wouldn't be here if he did. I can't waste time on such details."

The other chuckled. "All right. But you, Wadlin, see what you make of this. Give me a number with two digits."

Wadlin glanced at Story, and the other nodded; and Wadlin said quietly, "Ninety-nine!"

"Right," Marr agreed, and wrote on the paper before him. "Here you are," he said, and showed Wadlin what he had written. Wadlin glanced at the paper, saw there:

$$\frac{297}{99}$$

"Now give me another figure with two digits," Marr commanded. "You give me two numbers and I'll write two, and they'll all add up to two-ninety-seven."

Wadlin smiled faintly. "Ninety-nine," he repeated; and Marr wrote the digits down, and then hesitated, and then grinned ruefully.

"Shucks, you know it," he protested.

Wadlin shook his head. "Two-ninety-seven is ninety-nine plus one-ninety-eight," he said crisply. "Half one-ninety-eight is ninety-nine. You would subtract my number from ninety-nine and write the result as your number; do that twice. Obvious."

"Wasn't obvious to me," Marr protested, stared at the little man. "Say, are you satisfied with your job?"

"Yes," said Wadlin, and Marr grinned again and rose.

"Well, I'll move on," he announced. Glanced at Story. "Bidding on the hospital?" he inquired.

"I propose to," Story assured him.

"Wasting time," Marr declared. "I'm taking that myself. Let it alone."

Story smiled, and the other departed. Story glanced at Wadlin. "All right," he said. "Where were we?"

"Roof supports," Wadlin replied.

Story bent to his papers again. "We'll have to cut it fine to beat him," he commented. "He'll take a loss to get it; risk the inspection. All right, let's go on."

Wadlin looked at the other man's bowed head in a curious, appraising way.

"He'd probably pay you more than you're getting here," Story added, without looking up. "I don't want to stand in your way. You're getting all you're worth to me."

"Naturally," Wadlin replied.

"It's doubtful whether I'll ever pay you any more," Story insisted.

"Points of support. Reinforcement," Wadlin prompted; and they returned to the business in hand.

They were working on the matter of the hospital contract. The plans had been drafted by the state department which had the matter in charge; the specifications were exact and rigid; the amount of detail involved was enormous. Another than Wadlin might have been lost in the maze of figures, but the little man moved happily among his notes and his calculations, and Story, having put the matter in his hands, refrained from interference. The bids were to be opened in the offices of the department at noon on the twenty-fifth of February.

Dana, Story found, would not bid. "Too big for me, with what I have on hand," the other man said. Asquith would bid; but Asquith's banking background was weak. Story had no fear of him. There might be an outsider, someone not yet heard from; but if there were such a man his figure was not likely to be low, or if it were, the bond for performance must discourage him. Marr, Story felt sure, was his only real rival.

By the middle of February Wadlin had completed his calculations. He laid, one

morning a neat slip of paper on Story's desk. Story picked it up, read:

"At prices current, wages current, total cost to you of construction, including office charges and all other items, will be \$393,462.10."

Story studied it for a moment, looked up at little Wadlin with a stern eye. "You understand," he said, "I'm relying on your figures."

"The figures are correct," Wadlin replied precisely.

"If you've any doubt, say so. I can hire a man to check them for a hundred dollars."

"I have no doubt."

Story nodded. "All right," he said in dismissal, and Wadlin withdrew. Story began to calculate. His thoughts were vague and general. The labor situation was stable; no apparent likelihood of trouble; the market on materials gave no indications of approaching fluctuations. He might discount the possibility by advance purchases.

"Call it four hundred thousand," he thought. "Allow fifty thousand for mishaps. Four hundred and fifty. Say a profit of fifty thousand. Five hundred thousand. That's a fair price on the building too." Sat still for a while, considering—considering not figures but the human factor—Marr.

"He can build as cheaply," he confessed to himself. "He'll scamp if he has to. He can bid four-fifty. If I do that I'll have to scratch for my profit."

Rang for Wadlin again. "Have you a copy of these figures?" he asked, twisting the scrap of paper in his hand.

"All totals destroyed," Wadlin replied; and Story nodded and ripped the paper into little shreds and dropped them into his ash tray, touched a match to them there.

"It's a question of Marr," he said, half aloud; and Wadlin seemed for a moment about to speak, then held his tongue. There was, if Story had looked that way, a curious devotion in his eyes. After a moment the little man turned and left the room.

But that night when he got back to his boarding house there was an abstraction in his manner not usually to be seen there. He set down his daily records. Two-o-two-three calories. Three hundred and twelve steps from the subway platform to his room. He noted this discrepancy; he must have lagged a little on the way. Stumbled, it may be. Fifteen steps from his seat in the car to the foot of the stair. Eleven minutes, twenty-one seconds waiting to be served in the restaurant. Spoken to by the waiter and by the lodger in the hall. Total words—fourteen by him, five by the waiter and the lodger. Time in the office eight hours, seven minutes, fourteen seconds. Time in transit one hour, fourteen minutes, twelve seconds. Time eating—breakfast twelve minutes, three seconds; lunch thirty-six minutes, even; dinner forty-eight minutes, nine seconds. Expenditures—

Set all these matters gravely down. Yet in the end seemed not content. He put his records away and for a while sat thinking, his pencil making idle rows of figure 7's on a blank sheet of yellow paper. And in the end he went to his shelves and took out a book in which were pasted newspaper clippings, sheaves and sheaves of them; and he began painstakingly to read them through. Found at last one that held his eye.

Before he went to bed that night he made a note of the facts that he had lost three ounces during the day and that he had stayed up an hour and ten minutes and twenty seconds later than usual. But these circumstances seemed not to distress him; there was a certain contentment in his countenance as he lay in the darkened room before he went precisely off to sleep at last, as his long habit was.

When his own tasks next day were done he deviated from his long routine; instead of going directly to the restaurant where he was accustomed to dine, and then to his

room, he sought out the building in which Marr's office was, and inconspicuously waited there for Marr to emerge. Later he followed Marr. It might have been apparent to a spectator that Wadlin sought to discover where Marr went, what the other man would do.

The hospital bids were to be in on the twenty-fifth, to be opened at noon that day. On the twenty-third, in the afternoon, Wadlin approached Story, sought an interview; and when they were face to face the little man said diffidently:

"I wish to tell you that it is possible Marr will not bid on the hospital."

Story looked at the little man attentively. "What makes you say that?"

Wadlin did not reply. "If I am not in the office on the morning of the twenty-fifth," he said, "I will telephone you. I should know by then."

Story rose. "I say," he challenged, "what are you about? Are you planning something?"

"A mathematical recreation," said Wadlin precisely. "I will try to telephone. I hope his bid will not be in on time."

And for fear of saying more than he meant, he turned and took himself away; left Story to sit uncertain there, to weigh the possibilities in what Wadlin had suggested.

Marr was a bachelor and his home was in an apartment uptown. But it furnished him only with lodgings and breakfast. He had a tremendous appetite for work, was as like as not to stay in the office till uncertain hours; and this was particularly true when there was pressing business afoot, as there was now. At such times, however, he came down to dine in a small restaurant on the lower floor of his office building before returning to his evening stint of calculation and of planning. Wadlin had observed this habit of his.

On the evening of the twenty-fourth when Marr thus came into the restaurant the place was almost deserted. Only here and there at isolated tables solitary diners sat.

Marr was a gregarious man; he preferred company when there was company to be had; and Wadlin had seen him stop at such moments as this and survey the room, seeking some acquaintance among the persons there. When Marr thus looked about the room this evening he saw Wadlin at a distant table. The little man had not yet been served; he was absorbed in some task; he bent over a notebook open on the cloth and labored therein with calculations. Marr chuckled, brushed past the head waiter and crossed to the table where sat the little man; he clapped Wadlin on the shoulder, and when Wadlin looked up with dull and inattentive eyes Marr asked heartily:

"What are you figuring? Hospital? Late for that, isn't it?"

"I don't expect you're through figuring yet," Wadlin responded somewhat tartly.

Marr nodded. "Can't get the last word from the subcontractors till tomorrow morning," he agreed. "But my part of it's all done." He glanced at Wadlin's notebook. "That doesn't look like specifications."

Wadlin said somewhat morosely, "Just a problem that interested me."

"Stuck, are you?"

"I haven't found the key yet," Wadlin confessed. "The method of attack."

"What is it?" Marr insisted. "I never saw a problem yet that would stick me."

The waiter came to take his order; and their conversation was interrupted. But when the man was gone Marr returned to the point. "What's your difficulty?"

Wadlin protested. "Oh, it's just a trick thing."

"Let's have it," Marr insisted. "Let's have it."

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The little man still hesitated, said at last reluctantly, "Why, I had it at noon from a man uptown. Haven't been able to get it yet." Marr made an impatient, peremptory gesture; and Wadlin said vaguely, "It's just a problem in indeterminates, I think."

"What is it, man?" Marr cried. "Let me in on it. I'll straighten you out in no time."

"I don't want to bother you," Wadlin argued. "It's not as simple as it looks. I've been at it six hours and more."

"What is it? What is it?" Marr demanded. "You act as though it were confidential."

So at last Wadlin told him. "Well," he explained, "according to the way the thing was given to me, five men and a monkey were shipwrecked on a desert island, and they spent the first day gathering coconuts for food. Piled them all up together and then went to sleep for the night."

"But when they were all asleep one man woke up, and he thought there might be a row about dividing the coconuts in the morning, so he decided to take his share. So he divided the coconuts into five piles. He had one coconut left over, and he gave that to the monkey, and he hid his pile and put the rest all back together."

He looked at Marr; the man was listening attentively.

"So by and by the next man woke up and did the same thing," Wadlin continued. "And he had one left over, and he gave it to the monkey. And all five of the men did the same thing, one after the other; each one taking a fifth of the coconuts in the pile when he woke up, and each one having one left over for the monkey. And in the morning they divided what coconuts were left, and they came out in five equal shares."

He added morosely, "Of course each one must have known there were coconuts missing; but each one was guilty as the others, so they didn't say anything."

Marr asked sharply, "But what's the question?"

"How many coconuts were there in the beginning?" Wadlin meekly explained.

Marr laughed. "Why, that's simple enough. You just —"

But their victuals were served; the table was filled with viands; they could find no room for calculations. So when they were done Marr said, "Here, you come upstairs to the office and we'll work this out. It won't take long."

"I'd like to get it," Wadlin agreed, "before I go to sleep. There must be a formula, some way to work it."

"Won't take five minutes," Marr declared; and Wadlin said meekly:

"Well, I believe the record is fifty-eight minutes. But I've been at it hours."

Marr laughed. "Went at it wrong," he insisted. "Come along upstairs."

In Marr's office the big man bade Wadlin sit down; himself took pad and pencil. "Here, I'll show you," he explained. And, while Wadlin watched him with some attention, he wrote swiftly:

"x—original pile; a, b, c, d, e—shares of each man."

And he proceeded to form equations:

$$x = 5a + 1.$$

$$x - (a + 1) = 5b + 1.$$

And on in the same fashion, till abruptly he stopped and hesitated. "And that equals the remaining pile," he said. "How much was that?"

"We only know it was divisible by five," Wadlin replied gently.

"Call it y," Marr said carelessly; and Wadlin started to speak, then held his tongue, while Marr proceeded with the processes of substitution. Till presently Marr's pencil came to rest again, and he scratched his head.

"That leaves us two unknowns in one equation," he said reluctantly; and Wadlin nodded and commented in a meek tone: "I ran up against that too."

"No known quantities in the darned thing," Marr protested.

"No," Wadlin agreed.

"Why, it can't be solved," Marr cried, but Wadlin dissented.

"It's been done," he assured the other man. "You see, you do know the monkey got five coconuts, and you do know there were five men. It's been worked out, but I don't know just how to go at it."

For a moment there was silence; then Marr cried, "Wait a minute; I see it now." And began to write again.

Wadlin watched him with a contented little smile.

They sat late that night, the lighted windows in Marr's office the only gleam against the tall front of the office building. By and by Marr took off his collar; once or twice he rose and strode up and down the room; for a while he labored with a slide rule. And during the first hour or two there were moments when he was discouraged, ready to abandon the task. But at such moments Wadlin had always a suggestion to offer.

"Five must be a factor, somehow," he would say. "I think the number is some kind of a power of five."

And when that line of search was exhausted he would propose that they seek to make a formula.

"There must be one," he urged; "one that would fit all such problems."

Their formula, when they got one, covered four lines of figures and letters, running clear across the sheet; when they solved it—and that took an hour and ten minutes—the result they got was 7; a manifest impossibility.

They checked the formula for errors and found four, and made a new one which would not solve; they strove and panted and perspired; and little Wadlin, with the utmost gravity, made long calculations which came to nothing; solved tremendous equations which gave an absurd result at the end. Sheer weariness drove them at last to temporary surrender; they started uptown in a taxicab, and Marr offered to drop Wadlin at his boarding house.

"I'm not sleepy yet," Wadlin confessed as they were about to part. "A thing like this interests me. I'll probably work till I get it."

"I'll tell you," Marr suggested impulsively. "Neither am I. Come on up to my place and we'll wring this thing's neck somehow. No pile of coconuts can stump me. What do you say?"

"I'd like to get it," Wadlin agreed.

So they went on together, and at Marr's apartment they had coffee and cleared a

table and set to work again. But Marr was sleepy, his head continually drooped; and Wadlin at last said, "You rest a minute, sir. You've been doing all the figuring. I've got a new idea I want to try out."

There was a madness on Marr by this time; he shook his head. "No, no, I'm going to get this if it takes me till daylight."

Nevertheless, he did relax in his chair, watching through half-shut eyes Wadlin's flying pencil.

There was a tiny glint of light against its varnished side; it moved erratically yet rhythmically to and fro. By and by a sound came from his chair, and Wadlin saw that the big man was asleep.

He sighed a little, and very quietly he buried his own head in his arms. He was sleepy too. When later he awoke, cramped and stiff and cold, there was daylight in the windows, and Marr was slumped in the chair across from him, snoring heavily. Marr's chair was deep and comfortable; Wadlin brought a blanket from the other room and covered him over. Then he drew the heavy blinds. There was a clock upon the mantel; and he crossed and gently stopped the swinging of the pendulum; and he returned to his chair and kept ward there for a while. Once he looked at his watch and saw with satisfaction that it had run down; Marr's must have done the same. After the clock on the mantel had been still for an hour or so he started it again.

When Marr still slept the little man bethought himself of the telephone; it was, he discovered, in a cabinet in the hall, and he shut himself into the closet and in muffled tones put through a call to Story. When he was done he swathed the bell in his handkerchief so that it would not ring. Came back to the other room.

By and by Marr stirred and roused himself and groaned and opened his eyes to see Wadlin's pencil flying still. The room was dark, the lights burning; the window hangings were heavy.

He said huskily, "Hello!" Roused a little more. "Say, I've been asleep."

"I've almost got it," Wadlin told him. "At least, I've got an idea. You see, we overlooked the simplest thing. We started on the notion that this thing had five for a factor, but four is a factor too. That helps, don't you see. Four is a factor, and so is five; and so twenty is a factor."

"Then the number, if you subtract one, has twenty for a factor," Marr agreed, his interest reviving. "Say, I've been dreaming about coconuts. Millions of them. Fool

thing to take us so long." He pulled a pad toward him. "There aren't so many numbers that have twenty for a factor. Only five in each hundred," he pointed out.

"I think we could work it out by experiment that way," Wadlin assented. "But I'd like to do it by formula."

"I want to do it any old way. I'm not ashamed to use by-guess and by-gorry. Brute strength or anything," Marr commented. "Look here, Wadlin, the number remaining must have twenty for a factor too."

"It's the first number that we want," Wadlin reminded him.

Marr began to calculate again, his pencil moving; the point broke and he sharpened it. For a time there was silence between them.

And once, after a long while, Marr looked at his watch, and saw that it had run down; and he wound it and set it according to the clock on the mantel.

"I've got to get downtown by eleven," he said, half to himself. Wadlin made no comment at all.

The little man heard once or twice a muffled burr as the telephone labored to be heard. But it did not penetrate to Marr's ears. And Wadlin was growing very sleepy; it was a tremendous relief to him when at last the time came to say:

"Wait! Now! I'm on the track now, sir."

And in the jubilation over their belated success Wadlin held himself gravely; weary now, full of a vast contentment, and of some scorn too.

Then at last Marr discovered that the clock was slow; and so flung an understanding curse at Wadlin before he raced hopelessly away downtown.

Marr came storming in that afternoon. Wadlin was there in Story's office; he stood calmly while the big man trumpeted his wrongs.

And Story listened and smiled a little, but made no other comment at all.

Marr told Story he would make it his personal business to drive the other man out of the contracting field; and he swung at last upon Wadlin and poured out his wrath upon the little man.

"You'll get yours too," he promised. "This town will be too hot for you."

Wadlin said quietly, "It's one tale you're not like to tell." He was, in his still way, enjoying himself.

"I don't have to tell it," Marr retorted; but he flushed shamefully. "I've other ways."

"Someone else might tell," Wadlin reminded him warningly.

Marr swelled with speech unuttered, and Wadlin smiled, and Story chuckled and said gently, "Good-by, Coconuts."

The big man stood for a moment trembling, then with a cry he bolted through the door. After he was gone there was a little silence. Wadlin was waiting, and Story was thinking, and it was Story who spoke in the end.

"I got it at a comfortable figure, Wadlin," he said. "I banked on your word that he wouldn't bid. He came in late, and I refused to consent to accept his bid. There'll be a bonus for you."

Wadlin shook his head. "No need of that, sir," he replied.

Story looked at him thoughtfully. "You know," he said, "I don't see just why you did it. Marr had offered you a good job. And he's a mathematical shark, loves figures as well as you do. And I've no interest in such things. I should expect you to want to work for him, tie up with a man like that."

Wadlin hesitated. "Why, no," he said slowly. "You can hire men like me for things like that. He oughtn't to waste his time on them at all."

And Story, considering the matter at his leisure later, found something curiously appealing in the little man's humility. It occurred to him that a man may serve a mistress and despise her still.

If he be a little man.



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The Lone Sentinel Island, St. Lawrence River—Thousand Islands