



A R o y a l Q u a r r e l

WHEN THE KING AND THE DUKE GOT INTO THE RAFT, THE KING SHOOK me by the shoulders and shouted, "Trying to get away without us, were you? Are you tired of having us with you?"

"No, Your Majesty," I said. "Please don't hurt me."

"Quick, then, tell us what you were doing, or I'll shake the insides out of you."

"I'll be honest with you and tell you everything exactly as it happened. A huge man was holding my arm very tightly and said that he was sorry to see a boy in such a serious situation. Then they all were so surprised to find the bag of gold that he let go of my arm and whispered, 'Run now, or they'll certainly hang you.' I could see no good reason for me to stay and I didn't want to be hanged if I could avoid it. I ran as fast as I could and never stopped running until I found a canoe. I rowed to the raft and told Jim to hurry. I was certain that you and the duke had already been hanged. Jim and I felt very sad and we certainly were happy to see you two coming in your boat. Ask Jim. He'll tell you that I'm telling the truth."

Jim said that those were the facts—that everything that I had

said was the truth.

The king said that he did not believe a word of what I had said and was going to kill me, but the duke told him to take his hands off me. “You’re a fool. You know that you would have done the same thing if you were in his situation. Did you ask anyone in the crowd what had happened to *him*? I didn’t hear you if you did.”

The king stopped shaking me and began to complain about the town and everyone in it. But the duke said, “You have no one to blame but yourself for the problems that we now have. You refused to listen to any advice that I offered. The only smart thing that you said was about the tattoo. That’s what saved us. That got us to the graveyard where they dug up the body and found the bag of gold. It was only then that the excited fools let go of us, and we were able to run away.”

They were both quiet for a moment, thinking. Then the king said, “And we thought the slaves had stolen the money.”

“Yes,” said the duke slowly, “*we* thought that.”

After about a half minute, the king said slowly, “That’s what I thought, anyway.”

“I’m not certain that I agree with you. *I* thought that the money was stolen by the slaves. I don’t know what you thought.”

The king was beginning to sound angry. “What do you mean by that?”

“And what did you mean earlier? You sound as though you don’t believe me.”

“Perhaps you were asleep and didn’t know what you were doing,” said the king.

The duke was very angry now. “Do you think that I’m a fool? Do you think that I don’t know who hid that bag of money?”

“Of course you know who hid it,” shouted the king. “You hid it yourself.”

“That’s a lie!” And the duke jumped at him and tightened his hands around the king’s throat.

“Take your hands off my throat!”

“Tell the truth. Admit that you hid the money and had planned

to return later to dig it up. You planned to keep the complete 6,000 dollars and not share it with me.”

“I can’t believe what I’m hearing! Tell the truth, duke. Say that you honestly did not hide the money and I’ll believe you. And I promise that I’ll never again accuse you of stealing it.”

“You know perfectly well that I didn’t take the money.”

“I believe you, duke. But I want to ask one question—and don’t get angry with me. Did you ever *think* about stealing the money and hiding it?”

“It doesn’t matter what I may have *thought* about doing. I did not actually steal the money and you did.”

“I won’t say that I never *thought* about taking the money because I did think about it. But you—I mean *somebody*—stole the money before I could take it.”

“You’re lying! You stole the money and you have to admit it.” Then the duke began to tighten his hands around the king’s throat. The king began to make strange sounds and his face turned bright red. With his last breath, the king said, “I admit it.”

The duke took his hands away from the king’s throat. “If you ever deny that again I’ll kill you. Don’t cry like a baby now. You’re the cause of our problems. I trusted you like you were my own father. Now they not only have Peter Wilks’s money returned to them, but they have our money also. We have almost no money now. Go to bed. I don’t want to hear you speak again tonight.”

The king went to bed and took a bottle of whiskey with him for comfort. The duke had his own bottle of whiskey, and soon they were both very drunk and asleep in each other’s arms.

Now that the king had admitted taking the bag of money, I didn’t have to worry that somehow it would be discovered that I had actually hidden the money. Once I was certain that they both were asleep, I told Jim everything that had happened.